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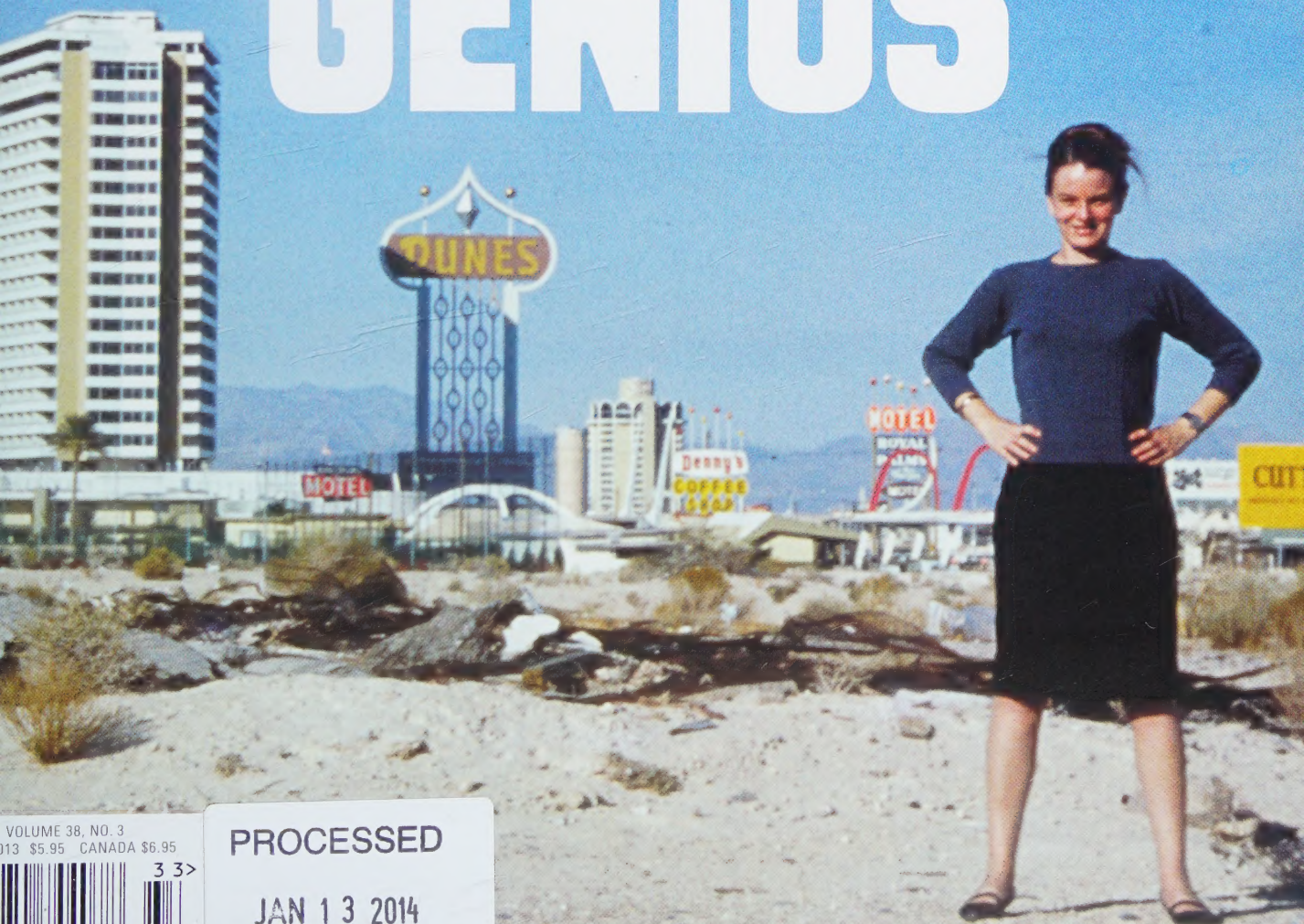
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in Los Angeles

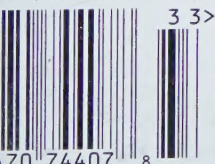
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Erica Jong Speaks Out

GENDER AND GENIUS



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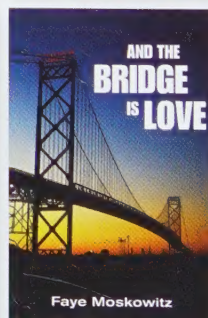
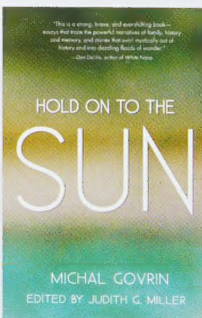
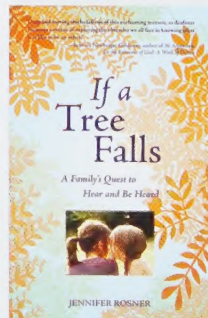
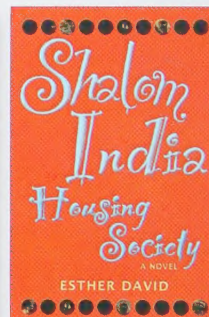
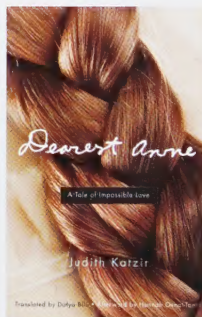
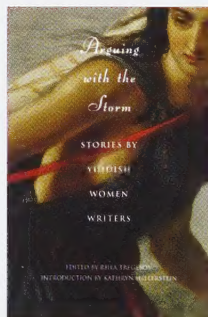
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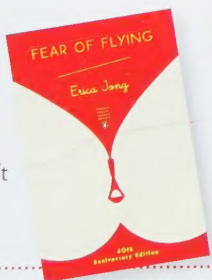
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"Money is the bio-fuel that sustains transformative change."

—Nessa Rapoport

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independent, Jewish & frankly feminist



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I see it falling into place. Many Lilith hypotheses about gender and Jews are borne out by the findings in “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” a study just out from the Pew Research Center.

Full disclosure: I am not a demographer. As an editor and writer, though, I’ve lived through several Jewish population studies

and I know that each one has brought its own panicked responses, including a cry, from decades back, that Jewish women were simply not having enough babies and that the Jewish birth rate was falling thanks to women’s selfish involvement with their own education. So when I look at the latest study, released in October, I understand that its data can be mined in many different ways. Here are a few salient findings relevant for Lilith readers.

Although only a few survey responses are separated out by gender, some telling differences between Jewish women and Jewish men emerge. Among them, the fact that more women than men say that being Jewish is “very” important in their

No religion? But charismatic women religious leaders in L.A. draw tens of thousands of Jews.

lives, and that religion also is “very” important to them. Yet, paradoxically, a Jewish woman is now more likely to marry a non-Jew than a Jewish man (a change from the National Jewish Population Survey of 2000–2001).

There’s some non-news in the study, too—like the fact one in five Jews say they have no religion. Or that the offspring of intermarriage are themselves more likely to intermarry than are Jews with two Jewish parents. (These phenomena were already emerging into the spotlight when I explored their origins in my 1989 book, *Intermarriage*.)

As this survey reveals, being Jewish is about more than *religion*. Twenty-two percent of the people surveyed identify themselves as Jews “of no religion.” Of this group, two-thirds are not raising their children Jewish in any way. But who is doing the raising? In heterosexual households, is it mothers who still have primary responsibility for naming the banner under which a child is being raised? And if Jewish women still feel undervalued as Jews (even after all these years of the women’s movement for change), are these women simply walking away? It seems not.

On the contrary. On almost every measure of what people consider essential to their Jewish identity, more women than men say that remembering the Holocaust, leading an ethical life, working for justice/equality and being intellectually curious are defining markers of whether one is Jewish. Women define themselves as more liberal than men, and—perhaps because, more often than men, women find themselves in need—more women than men want government to provide more services.

Several of the articles you’ll read here bear out these Pew findings.

For instance, Jewish women have been in the forefront of the ethical and political movements for reproductive freedom for more than a century (read, among other articles, “No, Margaret Sanger Wasn’t Jewish,” by Melissa Klapper, in the Lilith archive at *lilith.org*). In this issue, the harnessing of social justice to one’s Jewishness informs “Our Reproductive Selves,” a whole section in which you’ll meet an abortion foremother of the 1970s; a ritual-maker who mines Jewish sources for a prayer to repeat while she ambivalently undergoes an abortion; a truth-teller broadcasting the sad and oft-occluded statistics about how twenty-first-century technology is failing infertile women; and a twentysomething who’s a harbinger of why young Jewish women may become nurses.

The Pew survey shows that synagogue affiliation and attendance are dropping among non-Orthodox Jews. Yet you’ll read here about Jewish women religious leaders in Los Angeles who are magnets for tens of thousands of Jews, showing that women understand how to infuse Jewish activities with fresh meaning. Clearly, these are influential pockets of Jewish creativity led by charismatic women, animating Jewish sources for otherwise “non-religious” Jews who are looking for ways to celebrate a holiday, mark a milestone, engage with others right now.

Where will we find the next good ideas to keep Judaism, and Jewish identity, going?

When you’re looking for fresh ideas to seed change, know that you will harvest more of them when you’re receptive to diverse contributions. Our open-ended editorial meetings around the Lilith conference table convince me of this. Architect Esther Sperber’s cover story calls this “relational creativity.” Turns out that book clubs, college seminars, ateliers, writing groups, incubators and think tanks have learned this too: we (in this case meaning women) do some of our best, most original and innovative thinking not as solitary geniuses, but rather when we’re relating to others, in settings where our own ideas can germinate and develop from what is generated by the people around the table. And so it goes. I often say, when a single individual is credited with some particularly compelling topic or issue of Lilith magazine, that no publication (and likely no building and no research project) is the work of one person alone. So we’re pretty certain that the next best Jewish ideas—the corrections that will swing this or that piece of the data in another direction—will come from the kind of collective, generative, relational creativity you’ll encounter in Lilith’s pages.

Susan

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

Paraplegic or not,
you're not
off the hook.

It's important
to name them.

She was never a
mother by day and a
scholar by night.

You can't just
make up your
own Judaism!

She's going to be the
real gatekeeper.

They cooked less,
refusing to believe
it was their job to
stay home.

VOICES

Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men.
These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.



Women Cantors Sing Out

In May 2013, **Cantor Nancy Abramson**, Dean of the Cantorial School at the Jewish Theological Seminary, was installed as the international president of the Cantors Assembly (C.A.). She is the first woman president of this Conservative movement's cantors' organization, and the groundbreaking event was followed by a rousing concert of 72 female cantors, which began and concluded, appropriately, with the *shehechyanu* prayer.

When Abramson rose at her seat to be installed, the audience rose too, in a standing ovation, recognizing that history was being made.

"When I was little, I wished I were a man so I could become a cantor," Abramson told the crowd. "We are the pioneer generation. We have to create an image of a woman as a cantor."

When Abramson entered J.T.S. in 1981 as a student in the School of Sacred Music, she attended the same classes as the men, but was not allowed to participate in the choir or receive the same tutorials as her male classmates, nor would she receive the diploma of cantor. In frustration, she left the program and found her way into the cantorate by a private route.

When the C.A. first decided to admit women as members in 1990, about 80 right-wing men broke away in protest and formed their own group. (That group no longer exists.) **Cantor Eliezer Kirshblum**, a founder of the breakaway organization, announced at the time that any attempts by the C.A. to try to accommodate his group would fail. "You can't be traif and kosher at the same time," he said.

Sound familiar? When the first female Conservative rabbi, **Amy Eilberg**, was ordained in 1985, a group of rabbis also broke away

from the Conservative movement and formed the non-egalitarian and right-leaning Union of Traditional Judaism. They too claimed disappointment with the movement for leaning to the left. The last straw for both groups was the equality of women.

Elaine Shapiro Zimmerman, the first female cantor in the Conservative movement, graduated from the JTS School of Sacred Music in 1977 and was installed as a full time cantor the following year. She rightfully considers herself to be the "grandmother" to the over 100 female members of the C.A., and serves as a role model and mentor to them. Her own mentor, **Cantor Sol Mendelson**, called her "the Jackie Robinson of the cause."

Cantor Riki Lippitz, one of the first women to be inducted into the C.A., told *Lilith*: "Society was sexist, not the C.A. It was never an issue of men vs. women, but of men vs. men.... Membership [for women] was never a question of *if*, but of *when*," naming many men within the C.A. who had worked diligently to bring women in. Lippitz herself was inducted in 1991, four years after the diploma of cantor was conferred on her by JTS. By then, the leaders of the Conservative movement had decided that having women as cantors was permissible according to *halakha*; the challenge was now for social acceptance.

One of the highlights of the celebratory May concert — which honored not just Abramson's installation but also the accomplishments of all women cantors — was an emotional singing out of **Debbie Friedman's** song about Miriam the Prophet, who led the Israelite women away from Pharaoh and into freedom, dancing with timbrels. Appropriately, the performers joined hands and danced around the room, with Cantor Nancy Abramson in the lead.

NITA POLAY LEVIN

Taking Comedy Back to School

How has Jewish humor influenced today's stand-up comedy? This question is explored by "When Comedy Went to School," a documentary directed by **Mevlut Akkaya** and **Ron Frank**. The film chronicles the evolution of stand-up comedy from Jewish resorts in the Catskills, featuring interviews with classic Borscht Belt comedians such as **Jerry Lewis** and **Sid Caesar**.

What the film fails to explore is the strong vein of misogyny that runs through Jewish humor—yet it unintentionally brings questions about the treatment of women in Jewish jokes to the forefront.

Footage of the featured comedians' early stand-up careers is woven throughout the film, highlighting the familiar topics: religion, money—and Jewish women, especially wives.

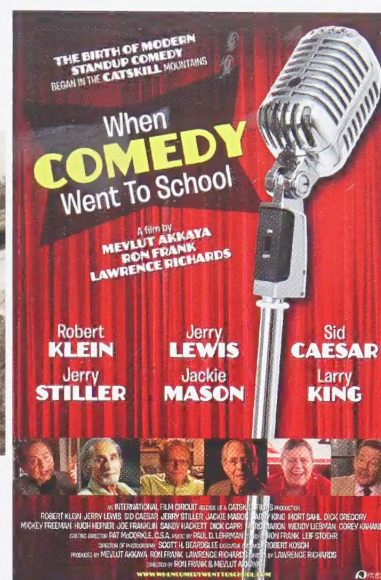
"I take my wife everywhere, but she keeps finding her way back"—a typical recurring Jewish joke featured in this film.

The problem is not that this film or even these Jewish comedians are particularly sexist. The problem is that these jokes are so familiar that they almost don't rankle—the joke about the overbearing, demanding, nagging Jewish woman is a comedic trope in Jewish humor. It is accepted and quotidian for a Jewish man to want to get rid of his wife—but why is this? Why are strong Jewish women the punching bag for male Jewish comedians—who aren't exactly so shy and docile themselves?

Sexism in stand-up comedy is not new—nor is it an exclusively Borscht Belt 1950s phenomenon. Walk into your standard New York City comedy club, and you will most likely hear male comedians



Right: Poster for "When Comedy Went to School." Above: Sid Caesar and his fiancée, Florence, at Avon Lodge.



making cracks about women and their differences from men. But jokes about women play a disproportionately large role in Jewish stand-up comedy.

Son: How much does it cost to get married, Dad?

Father: I don't know, son, I'm still paying for it.

When was the first Jewish wife joke told, and by whom? We can't really know that. When will the last one be told? The sooner the better.

MIRIAM OLENICK

When You Can't Afford a Diaper

"Once you start noticing, the need is everywhere." So says **Joanne Samuel Goldblum**, founder and president of The National Diaper Bank Network (diaperbanknetwork.org), the largest diaper bank organization in the nation. She created this innovative nonprofit in New Haven, CT, 10 years ago. This year, through the National Diaper Bank Network, she distributed more than 15 million free diapers to needy families across the country. According to the organization's website, nearly 30 percent of low-income families cannot afford diapers.

Honored widely for her pioneering work, Goldblum told *Lilith* that her early experiences as a social worker, seeing a need that is often quite invisible, moved her to relieve the pain of babies and children who have to spend all day in a urine-soaked diaper—and the shame and depression their mothers suffer (yes, most often the mothers) when they have to put a kid to bed in a dirty diaper because they can't afford clean ones. Or can't go to work because they don't have the money for the diapers you

need to send to daycare. "And you are not allowed to pay for diapers on food stamps!" said Goldblum.

"With diapers, once you see the need you start to see it everywhere—towels, shampoo, soap, toilet paper. When you start to think about what happens to families when you cannot afford these things... oral hygiene problems because they don't have toothpaste or kids going to school dirty because there is no laundry detergent....

"We are talking about diapers, but the bigger picture we are talking about is poverty, and about kids in America—and we manage to ignore this to a large degree."

Goldblum says her mother, **Ellen Samuel Luger**, a social worker active in reproductive rights, is her model for activism. "It's striking to me how many social workers are Jewish women! This fits incredibly well with what you learn as a Jew about social justice. Tikkun Olam is what the rabbi talked about" in the New Jersey Reform congregation where she grew up.

So why are "churches" and not "syna-

gogues" mentioned on The Diaper Bank Network's website? Although there are synagogues and temples that run diaper drives, Goldblum said, "I have had less luck getting in to speak at synagogues than at churches. It likely has more to do with the ways churches and synagogues do community outreach. We certainly get a lot of support from people affiliated with synagogues. The Diaper Bank Network has been trying really hard to find ways to connect with organizations like JCCs and early childhood programs." Not surprisingly, Goldblum notes that the biggest category of individual supporters is "young parents—and grandparents."

One of the seemingly simple policy changes Goldblum advocates is for social-service agencies to have a line item for diapers, which they give out frequently. "They only call them 'incidentals' in their budget, though they do spend money on these things. It's important to name them, so people notice them."

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

And now, Shlomo Carlebach the Musical...

To many of his fans, **Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach** was a great musician. To others, he was a gifted storyteller. To many of his followers, his music and stories were mere vehicles for teaching Torah. But what really mattered to Carlebach was people. To him, music and Torah and God and Hasidic tales were vehicles for reaching hearts—of Jews and non-Jews alike.

Such is the message of “Soul Doctor,” the musical bioplay about Carlebach’s life, written by **Daniel Wise** and starring **Eric Anderson** in the title role, which opened on Broadway in August. Carlebach, who died in 1994, was an Orthodox-trained rabbi from an illustrious rabbinic family in pre-World War II Germany. His melodies are now standard in synagogues and at Jewish weddings throughout the world. During his lifetime, however, Carlebach was far from mainstream. The show chronicles his tumultuous early years: fleeing from Austria to America as a child in 1938, his days as a yeshiva student and young Hasid of the Rebbe of Lubavitch, his evenings of exploration, tentatively stepping away from the study hall to play music in bars and music clubs, until finally establishing his outpost of “holy hippelech,” as he called his followers, at the House of Love and Prayer, in Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco.

Along the way, he is taught to play guitar by a blind, homeless woman; develops a friendship with **Nina Simone** (played spectacularly by **Amber Iman**) from whom he learned about, and drew inspiration from, gospel music and revival meetings; and finally, is banned by the Orthodox establishment. The rabbis excoriate him for his unconventional ways: hugging and kissing women, allowing women to sing along with him, and imbibing the free-love, hippie spirit of the 60s, all of which was anathema to Orthodoxy.

And yet, his influence seeped back in through the cracks.

I remember when I first heard Carlebach. It was during the early 90s, and I was a teenage yeshiva student studying among the Skver Hasidim of New Square, N.Y. I was in my room in the yeshiva dormitory, when a friend slipped me an audiocassette. “Listen to this,” he said quietly. “You’ll like it.”

The tape was “Shlomo Carlebach’s Greatest Stories,” and I stuck it into my Sony Walkman, on which I ordinarily listened to Torah lectures and an occasional cantorial album. Over the next week, each night after the dormitory monitor left, I would listen to the stories of Chatzkele Lekuvud Shabbos, and the Holy Miser, and the

Blind Beggar, and the Heiliger Kotzker Rebbe and the Sea of Jewish Tears.

These were Hasidic tales like I’d never heard before—and this in a world where Hasidic tales were all the tales you got. There was something about how Carlebach told them, the music of his voice, the German-Yiddish inflections with the soft accompaniment on guitar, the folksy, rambling diction that gave it all the world’s charm, and, most of all, the pain and the joy his stories conveyed.

I hadn’t heard any of Carlebach’s albums before, although I’d been aware of him. Every now and then it was whispered that one popular Hasidic melody or another was composed by him—“*ah kahlbach niggun*,” some zealot would hiss furiously—but the song would be sung anyway, since, really, who was to know for certain, if no one could publicly admit to listening to the records?

It was in that first tape that I was struck by one line, which would come to define Carlebach for me. It was a Yiddish quote from Rab Kalmishel of Piasetzna: “*Di greste zach in di velt iz tihn yenem a toiveh*.”

The greatest thing in the world is to do someone a favor.

Not Torah study, or prayer, or keeping the Sabbath, or any of the other commandments. Not even to perform some monumental good deed.

Just do someone a favor. Pass the peas. Hold open a door. Keep the light on.

This was not just a good thing, but *the greatest thing in the world*.

Mamesh, a gevald. The deepest depths.

That was Carlebach’s standard description for his stories and the people in them—“the deepest of the deep, the sweetest of the sweet, the holiest of the



PRODUCTION PHOTOS © CAROL ROSEGG

When **Bill Gates** and **Warren Buffett** convened dinners for billionaires to discuss philanthropy, **Melinda Gates** made sure that wives were invited, too. “Even if he’s the one that made the money, she’s going to be a real gatekeeper,” she said. “And she’s got to go along with any philanthropic plan because it affects her and it affects their kids.”

from “Why Men Need Women,” by **Adam Grant** in the New York Times, July 20, 2013.



holy”—although in the strictest sense, “deep” wasn’t what his messages were, exactly. Sometimes they were quite superficial, if counter-intuitive, and more than a little sentimental, but Carlebach was a genius at knowing what stirred people, and he found hints within the tradition for those feel-good vibes.

In “Soul Doctor,” Carlebach is seen first getting those vibes from a revival meeting he is invited to by Simone, where he watches worshippers whipped into an ecstatic frenzy through one of his own songs. This inspires him to do something similar at his father’s synagogue, where his task is, literally, to “wake up the shul president.”

His father (**Jamie Jackson**), however, is not pleased. “You can’t make up your own Judaism!”

But that’s precisely what the real-life Carlebach intended to do—although not without precedent. He

“He was a charismatic person, but with not a lot of self-control.”

would ultimately be drawn to the hippie counter-culture, but even more, he was drawn to the counter-culture within the Hasidic tradition, the schools of Breslov and Izhbitz, where sinners are saints and saints are fools, and God, well, God, too, just wants love, because He too is just alone in His Great Oneness and desperate for a kind word and maybe a hug.

“Soul Doctor,” it must be said, omits mention of Carlebach’s more shadowy side. In 1998, this magazine reported on allegations of sexual harassment and abuse by Carlebach made by a number of women, along with attempts by some of Carlebach’s devotees to suppress what they saw as the tarnishing of Carlebach’s memory. Certainly, this was not quite the Carlebach of “*mamesh, gevald*, the sweetest of the sweet.”

In an interview with the New York Times, Mr. Wise, the show’s creator, disputed the allegations. “He hugged and kissed everyone,” the Times quotes Mr. Wise as saying. “He was a puppy dog, not a predator.”

According to others, however, the allegations are consistent with Carlebach’s personality. “None of this was surprising to people who knew him well,” says **Shaul Magid**, professor of Modern Judaism at Indiana University in Bloomington, who has written considerably about Carlebach’s work. “He was a charismatic person, and also a man with very strong feelings, but with not a lot of self-control.”

While the show doesn’t touch on these issues, perhaps it sheds light on the subject in a roundabout way. As Magid said to me, “Shlomo was basically a yeshiva *bachur* [student] who transitioned to a very unfamiliar world, and very quickly found himself in a position of tremendous influence. He probably never developed a proper sense of boundaries.”

“Soul Doctor,” indeed, gives us a portrait of Carlebach in those early years as a sheltered, diffident young Hasid, comfortable in the study hall with his religious texts but completely flustered when so much as offered a handshake by a woman. In fact, what is perhaps the greatest accomplishment of “Soul Doctor” is the glimpse it

offers into Carlebach’s formative years, and the context in which the man, rather than the myth, was created. While thousands considered Carlebach a friend, few of them knew him as a young adult. By the time he established The House of Love and Prayer, Carlebach was well into his 40s, far removed from his ultra-Orthodox origins. “Soul Doctor” opens a window into that early, chaotic transition from a life of Torah study and piety to the heady atmosphere of free love and psychedelics and the Summer of Love.

“Soul Doctor” might strike some as uncomfortably hagiographic, as it studiously avoids an honest examination of the man and his complex legacy. But it succeeds in its intentions: stirring audiences with its message of music and love. The musical numbers are mostly made up of Carlebach favorites, both soulful and exuberant tunes adapted to new, English lyrics. The result is a happy-clappy crowd-pleaser.

SHULEM DEEN

VISIT LILITH.ORG for Sarah Blustain’s groundbreaking article on the singing rabbi’s paradoxical legacy to women: “Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach’s Shadow Side.”

Aware that she is seen as a role model to other young Arab women, **Mais Ali-Selah** also knows that she is breaking common misperceptions and stereotypes. “The media emphasizes negative things about Muslims and does not emphasize the positive,” Ali-Selah said... “There is nowhere in the Koran that states women should not study,” Ali-Selah explained. In fact, she said that the Koran emphasizes that women must learn because they are the ones to educate the children. The same is true of women’s dress. Women are supposed to dress modestly, but there are no Islamic laws stating that women need to wear long robes or cover their faces.

MAIS ALI-SALEH, quoted by **Diana Bletter** in “Guess Who’s Valedictorian at Israel’s Top Medical School?,” the Huffington Post, July 16, 2013.

An Inclusive Mikveh

Jewish law requires that all converts—whether old or young, men or women, able-bodied or not—immerse in the mikveh to become Jewish. Paraplegic or not, **Larry** was not off the hook if he wanted to be considered Jewish according to Jewish law...

It occurred to me... maybe we can learn something from this legal reality. If we were to say that all the Larrys of the world were exempt from immersing, it would in a way be saying that they don't matter. We can push them off to the side, saying, "We don't know how to deal with you, so we won't." If, however, people such as Larry are required to immerse like the rest of us, then it's not Larry's problem alone. It's our problem. The onus is on the community to make it possible...

Larry and Mayyim Hayyim partnered together, making it possible for him and all the others with physical disabilities to follow, to use the mikveh with dignity. Since then we've welcomed more new Jews, a woman on crutches for her monthly immersions, a terminally ill cancer patient immersing at the end of life, an obese woman looking for a fresh start at Rosh Hashanah—none of whom would have been able to immerse without an accessible mikveh.

After all, if someone like Larry wants to immerse in the mikveh, shouldn't we give it our all to make it possible?

from "Message From An Accessible Mikveh: The Onus Is On The Community," by **Carrie Bornstein** at thejewishweek.com, August 14, 2013.



An Anti-Rape Project Honors Dinah

Both victims of rape, **Annie Clarke** and **Andrea Pino** are at the heart of a federal complaint that has received nationwide media attention in recent months. The two charge that the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill violates Title IX—which requires colleges receiving federal aid to combat gender-based violence and harassment—by its improper handling of sexual assault and rape cases. They also initiated Know Your IX, a campaign to educate college students about their rights under federal law.

And, while neither is Jewish, each woman has co-chaired a campus project dealing with women's safety and empowerment that has its roots in a Jewish campus group.

Project Dinah was born in 2004 when a group of first-year women, all members of the UNC Hillel, began hearing about assaults on their campus as well as at other colleges. "We felt like that was a world we didn't want," says **Allison Rose Socol**, one of the founders.

The original six young women also "felt very strongly there was a voice missing both on campus and in the Jewish community about this issue," says Socol, 27, now a UNC graduate student.

They brought their concerns to **Or Mars**, who was then the Hillel director, and began working closely with **Jenn Harrington**, who was the Hillel Jewish Campus Service Corps.

At the time, many of the women had just read *The Red Tent* by **Anita Diamant**, a novel that focuses on Dinah, a biblical figure who was raped (Gen. 34). The women decided to give voice to Dinah by naming the group for her. "We felt that would be the representative figure from the

Bible," Harrington says, to connect the group to Judaism.

Harrington won a Kolker Saxon Hallock Foundation grant from Hillel for Project Dinah. For its first effort, the project distributed 1,500 safety whistles, along with wallet cards printed with information on health and crisis centers, information on Project Dinah, and the roots of the organization's name.

"We had great success" with the distribution, says **Emily Dunn**, 27, another of the founders. It gave the project "a little bit of name recognition on campus." By the next year, Project Dinah filed as a campuswide group, no longer under the Hillel rubric. Other efforts followed, including Take Back the Night rallies and the Clothesline Project, both designed to raise awareness about sexual assaults; Speak Out UNC, a blog where people can write anonymously about their rape and assault experiences; self-defense classes; and an I Heart Orgasm sexual education program.

For some of the women involved, Project Dinah has had an impact beyond college. Many of the women are "still involved in rape crisis centers and advocacy and things of that nature," says Dunn, noting that her work in Project Dinah "made me the feminist I am today."

A birth doula who advocates for maternity care, she says that such a job "may not have even been on my radar had it not been for Project Dinah."

And, while Project Dinah's affiliation with Hillel was short, "When new members join we talk about the history of P.D. We definitely tell it every year," says Pino, now a UNC senior.

DEBRA RUBIN

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The Hasidic sect of Gur was shocked to learn that their rabbi has issued a ban on handshakes between men as it might lead some to sin, according to a report in the *Charedi World*. At a recent meeting, the head of the Gur education department, **Abraham Benjamin Silberberg**, said that shaking another man's hand is now prohibited because it can lead to sinful thoughts. Silberberg notified education supervisors about the new ruling at the special meeting, and ordered them to begin educating Gur boys about deviant male handshakes. Silberberg said that two males are only allowed to touch each other's fingertips, however, it is better for men and boys to avoid touching completely.

from "Grand rabbi of Gur bans handshakes between men because it can lead to sin," by **John Roberts** at *yourjewishnews.com*.

So my friends and I got to eat take-out from McDonald's and dinner from Domino's, not every day, but maybe once a week. Why? Because our parents didn't want to cook all the time. My mother and her friends did cook—and their husbands often didn't—but they didn't exalt cooking as some sort of progressive act... Their political stand was different: They cooked less, refusing to believe it was their job to stay home all day preparing a nutritious meal for their families... Making time for themselves was also a political act.

MARK OPPENHEIMER in *The New Republic*, July 15, 2013, writing about mothers' roles in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Choosing One's Foremothers: The Tikva Frymer-Kensky Chair

When the University of Michigan, in June 2013, appointed **Anita Norich**, acclaimed scholar of American Yiddish literature, to a Collegiate Chair—an appointment that brings with it the opportunity to select the chair's name—she chose to name it for the pioneering feminist scholar of biblical literature, **Tikva Frymer-Kensky** (1943–2006).

Frymer-Kensky's intellectual odyssey reflected some of the trials of the first generation of academic feminists. Her Ph.D. from Yale University in Assyriology and her lifelong commitment to feminism spurred her to employ her enormous knowledge of ancient texts, religions and languages toward further understanding in the modern world and fueled her passionate explication of the Bible.

When Norich arrived in Ann Arbor 30 years ago, she met Frymer-Kensky. Norich recalled that, "In addition to being a much-admired scholar, with a prodigious intellect and fierce commitment to Judaism and to feminism—all things that are of obvious importance to me—Tikva was one of the first people to make me feel welcome in Ann Arbor. She and her husband, **Alan Kensky**—who was the rabbi at Beth Israel in those years—were the models of Jewish and scholarly dedication I strive to emulate." Norich recognized that "Tikva



Anita Norich

followed a career path that was not typical (except in the case of many women) in a field dominated by men. It almost sounds like a cliché these days to say that she found a way to balance family life and scholarship, but she did it in ways that were not at all a cliché. As her family grew (with two children who are now Jewish Studies scholars), so did her scholarly work. She was never a mother and wife by day and a scholar by night, but always entirely inhabited all of these identities at once." For Norich, just starting out as an assistant professor, Frymer-Kensky's dedication inspired her. "Out of the academy for many years, she continued to pursue—and excel in—her academic work."

Frymer-Kensky solidified her reputation after she left Ann Arbor with her family for an appointment at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia, and then, in 1995, took a position at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Her groundbreaking 1992 book, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth*, asks big questions, tackling such issues as what

does it mean to have a gender, religiously speaking? Norich observes that "The title of her first (of several) books should be the title of everything written about her: "In the Wake of the Goddesses."

Once she found her remarkable voice, Frymer-Kensky's extraordinary intellect was unstoppable. In 1995, she boldly published a very different kind of book that spoke directly to contemporaries: *Motherprayer: The Pregnant Woman's Spiritual Companion*. Her next book, *Reading Women of the Bible* (2002), bridged significant divides between academic and lay audiences. It swept all of the major Jewish awards and generated widespread excitement over a new vision and understanding of biblical women.

Frymer-Kensky opened doors for other feminist scholars to enter. She was the model of a bold intellect, a caring mother and partner, a profound scholar of the religions of antiquity and a committed Jewish woman.

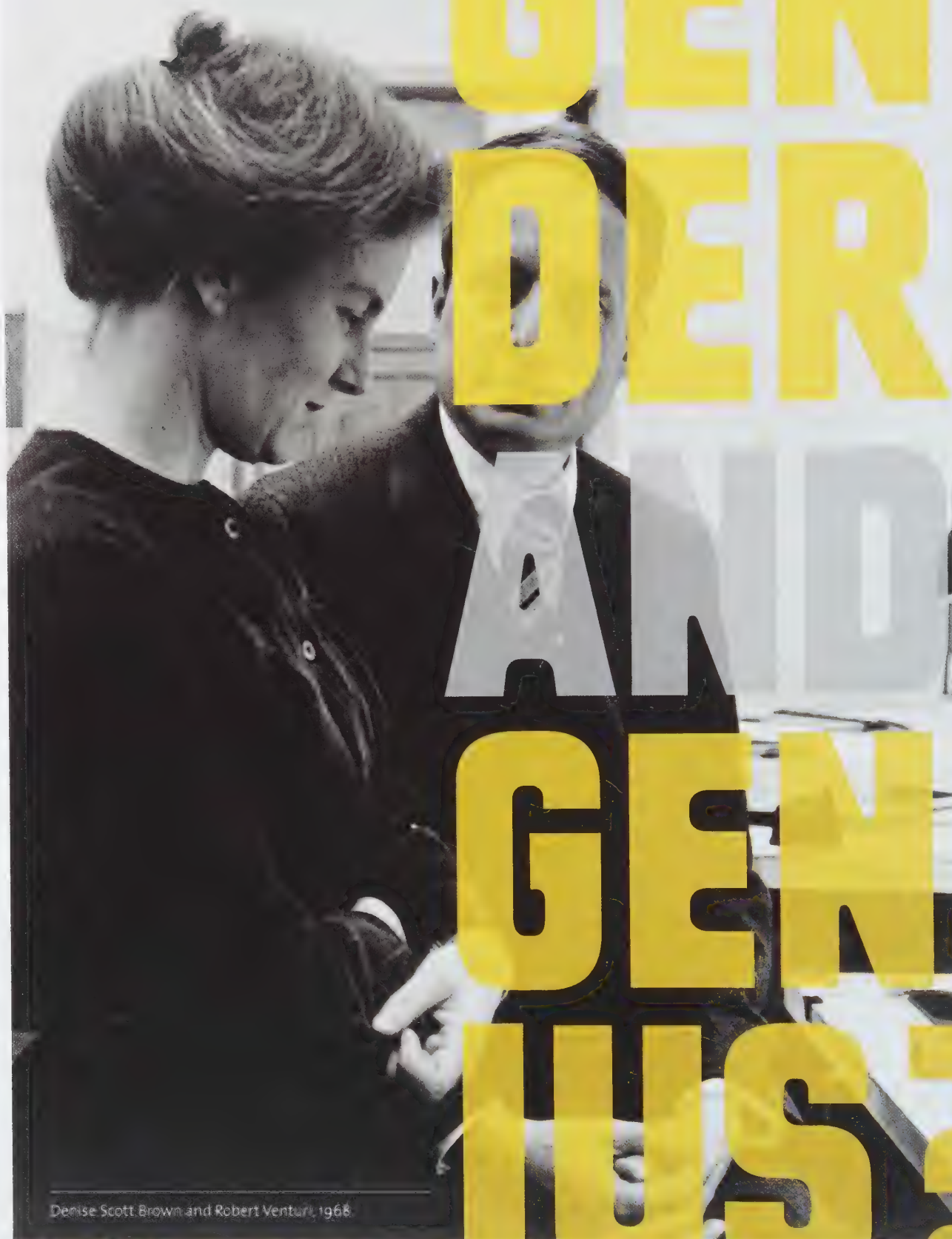
What's in a name? Perhaps more than we realize. In choosing to occupy the Tikva Frymer-Kensky Chair at the University of Michigan, Anita Norich celebrates and contributes to an important intellectual feminist heritage.

DEBORAH DASH MOORE

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Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi, 1968

Revising Our Ideas About Collective Inspiration

by ESTHER SPERBER

After months of architectural design, bidding, negotiations and city approvals, we finally entered the site for our first weekly construction meeting. The general contractor had started the demolition, and I was excited to see the bare space, its walls and other distractions removed, and to imagine the place as we'd designed it. Richard and I entered the apartment for the meeting. Raymond, our general contractor, was late, but the new site manager was waiting for us. When he noticed us, he walked over to Richard, a graying man of around 60, shook his hand and introduced himself. Richard, accustomed to this situation, introduced himself, smiled and then introduced me, announcing, "Please meet my boss, Esther."

In the 10 years I've been running my architectural practice, I, like Richard, have gotten accustomed to people assuming that my male employees—whether younger or older—are the lead architects who will be making final decisions. Yet this time a lingering frustration colored the rest of my day, a sense that while feminism has made significant progress on a conscious level, little change has trickled down into the unconscious of our culture.

My invisibility annoyed me, perhaps because the architectural community was buzzing about the Pritzker Prize that was denied Denise Scott Brown (née Lakofski) when it was awarded to her work partner and husband, Robert Venturi, in 1991. Architectural historians and practitioners alike agree that the two are "among the most influential architects of the twentieth century." The Pritzker, a kind of Nobel Prize for architects, has been conferred since 1979. Conceived to recognize an individual, the prize aspires to encourage and stimulate not only a greater public awareness of buildings, but to inspire greater creativity within the architectural profession. When Robert Venturi was selected for the Pritzker in 1991 (the committee adhering to the original prize rule that it could be given only to one person), Scott Brown was passed over, her role in the making of their joint work made invisible.

"D.S.B." (as she is often referred to), an outspoken, South African-born Jewish woman, has been voicing her frustration over the place of women in architecture since the early 1970s, and refused to attend the prize ceremony with her husband in protest of her exclusion. When the 2013 Pritzker Prize laureate (Toyo Ito, another man) was announced, Denise Scott Brown said in a video interview from London, "They owe me not a Pritzker Prize but a Pritzker inclusion ceremony. Let's salute the notion of joint creativity."

After hearing D.S.B.'s comment, two Harvard graduate students, Arielle Assouline-Lichten and Caroline James, launched a headline-making online petition calling on the prize committee to recognize her work and include her in the prize that Venturi received. Harnessing the power of social media, the petition

caught the imagination of the architectural community and the general public. To date, it has collected over 18,000 signatures.

Scott Brown grew up in South Africa and completed her architectural studies at the prestigious Architecture Association school in London, an artsy, cutting edge lab for architecture (Rem Koolhaas and Zaha Hadid later studied and taught there). Passionate about the need for social change in the built environment, she came to the U.S. and enrolled in the urban planning program at the University of Pennsylvania. Venturi's education was quite different. He studied architecture at Princeton University, a program that was steeped in art and architecture history, closely studying the historic masterpieces of the past.

Their marriage, both professional and personal, synthesized their distinct backgrounds and reflected their individual styles and interests. Venturi's dowry included a house and a book. Completed in 1964, the Vanna Venturi house, which he designed for his mother, had already stirred much controversy by applying decorative and historical elements to a contemporary house. Venturi's first book, *Complexity and Contradiction* (1966), continued his critique of the reductionist aspects of prevailing modernism. He countered Mies Van De Rohe's famous dictum "Less is More" with a mischievous, post-modern "Less is a Bore."

Scott Brown brought her own intellectual commitments to their joint practice. "Social change and the unrest that went with it dogged my steps in every place." She developed a curiosity to study what appears as non-architecture—the everyday and the readymade. On a trip to the West Coast she stopped in Las Vegas and "resolved to teach a studio about the desert city and its famous strip," which she did in 1968 with Venturi and another instructor and 13 Yale students.

Venturi and Scott Brown's joint work made a strong mark on architecture in the second half of the 20th century. Their buildings celebrated what they saw as a new Mannerism, embracing the right of those who know the rules to exaggerate and diverge from them. But perhaps their biggest contribution was their book (written with Steven Izenour) *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), a groundbreaking look at the built environment of the American commercial strip. In Las Vegas, the couple found a new kind of architecture, one of billboards and neon signage, fast food and vast parking lots. This was an architecture that juxtaposes the beautiful and the ugly, accepting the legitimacy of both as expressions of life.

Denise Scott Brown's story gives us a vantage point from which to consider the place of women in the workforce, at a time when we are exploring how and where to "Lean in." One might be encouraged that a survey conducted by the American Institute of Architects (A.I.A.) in 2012 found that women are now 41% of

the graduate students of architectural programs. Yet the survey also notes that only 17% of licensed architects are women, a statistic that reflects both the few women who entered the profession in the past and the high rate of attrition among women in their thirties and forties from a profession that demands late hours and long weekends. It is hard not to notice that of the 37 Pritzker laureates only two are women, Zaha Hadid in 2004 and Kazuyo Sejima in 2010 (shared, after the prize rules were changed, with her partner Ryue Nishizawa), reflecting an even greater scarcity of women at the top of the profession's pyramid. One can see as a sign of progress that in the last nine years two women have received the Pritzker. In addition, only five architects have received a \$500,000 MacArthur Genius Grant and two are women, Elizabeth Diller and Jeanne Gang.

One does not need to make an essentialist argument that women have a special way of designing to acknowledge that women's experiences are physically and culturally different from those of men. In 1967, Scott Brown published "Planning the Powder Room," a short essay in which she informs her male colleagues that "there are some areas where, in the nature of our society, personal experience is impossible for the male architects, and feedback from the public unlikely. Such an area is the ladies' powder room....We shall be dealing primarily with logistics and

storage problems. The main questions: what to do with the coat? And secondly, the handbag and/or gloves, book pile and shopping bag, and on occasions hat and umbrella." She looks hard at reality, sees what others missed and uses her analysis as a vehicle for innovative design. I plan to use her suggestion to add hooks on the outer side of toilet stall doors, a sensible place to hang your coat while washing your hands.

But let's return to the second part of Scott Brown's statement in that video interview: "Let's salute the notion of joint creativity." This idea calls into question many assumptions about individual genius in art, literature and science that participate in the marginalization of women in these fields.

Christine Battersby, in her book *Gender and Genius*, studies the evolution of the genius concept. She notes that from antiquity through the Renaissance, the artist was one who perfected past techniques and imitated nature. By the late 18th century, Romanticism introduced a new idea, that of the artist's originality. The Romantic artist was uniquely gifted, autonomous and decidedly male. Battersby gives a haunting quote from Lombardo (1863) who says, "there are no women of genius; the women of genius are men." Modern architecture, despite breaking with the past stylistically, nonetheless maintains this image of the gifted architect as a lone autonomous genius who

Jews, Women, Architects. At the Same Time.

Architect Esther Sperber, daughter of a Talmud scholar, draws on the poetics of space as well as creative problem-solving—two of architecture's key concerns—for her work with Jewish organizations and beyond. In 2008, she won a competition to design the Keshet synagogue in Englewood, New Jersey (unbuilt). Beginning with the community's name, meaning knot or connection, she organized her design around the concept of continuous connectedness, creating a network of ramps to aid members of different ability levels in accessing the sanctuary. For ornament and texture, Sperber incorporated the evocative beauty of Hebrew script, bringing the centrality of text in Jewish life into physical form. Her design for the Orthodox congregation carves the new structure into the surrounding landscape, resulting in an L-shaped sanctuary that creates women's and men's sections in a non-hierarchical orientation, each enjoying open vistas and natural daylighting.

For the Fort Tryon Jewish Center (in progress), Sperber was invited to reorganize the community's sanctuary, a cavernous and unapologetic remnant of another era in communal life, with row upon row facing unilater-

ally toward a disconnected bimah. The space, used presently by groups of various scales, called for a solution that would feel comfortable during intimate minyanim as well as community-wide events. Sperber took her inspiration from pages of Talmud, wrapping seating around a central kernel, the bimah, working outward from the center and creating a cocoon of seating that can function intimately as well as with a surging crowd.

Jewish architects are among the best-known figures in the past century, men like Louis Kahn, Frank Gehry (né Goldberg), Marcel Breuer, and Daniel Libeskind. Among Jews, women are known as some of the most outspoken individuals, which makes their absence from the architecture all-star list all the more noteworthy. What explains the shockingly low proportion of women in architecture generally? And does this intersect with Jewish identity? In Jewish culture, with the centrality of family life, the choice or necessity to extend oneself in the professional sphere becomes more fraught. In architecture, the question of work-life balance is difficult to broach.

From inside, the profession describes itself as a calling, with the privilege of self-ex-

pression paid for through personal sacrifice. What does flex-time look like for an artist? "Flexibility is a key for women," according to architect Louise Braverman. "There is no 'women's architecture'. The work is an equalizing force. But women's paths in the field are going to be different. The field enforces by omission. Just denying that women's paths are going to be different is a kind of omission." Braverman graduated from Yale's architecture program in 1977, one of seven women. She was aware of her outsider status from the start, observing the collegiality among the men in her cohort. She wanted a leadership position and didn't foresee this materializing in a traditional firm, so she started her own "as soon as I possibly could... I had to be bold or quit the field." Braverman's boldness won her recognition along the way, including, in 2008, her attainment of the status of Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.

Like other intense professional programs, architecture school admits to being "trial by fire." And the philosophies of architecture are far-reaching: the embrace of a rational futurism, the all-consuming mission of the artist, the deep aesthetic and economic

overcomes gravity and prevails over his client. In my experience, most women—and many men—do not work this way.

A growing body of recent research shows that creativity is not necessarily the domain of autonomous individuals. Rather than an inner activity done in solitude, it has been found that people often discover their thoughts and ideas through interactions with others. I first encountered this research when I tried to apply psychoanalytic ideas of creativity to my architectural design experience. Traditional psychoanalytic literature views art as sublimation, a process in which the artist's inner unconscious and erotic forces are converted into a socially acceptable expression in the artistic product. But this description misses what for me is the most pleasurable part of design, and that's the shared creative experience. I cherish those moments when everyday boundaries between me and my design collaborators get blurred, when who-said-what is no longer relevant or decipherable and innovative ideas emerge from interaction. The eminent child psychologist D.W. Winnicott spoke of this phenomenon when he suggested that the baby learns to experience her own emotions through the mirroring reflected by her mother. More recently, the relational approach to psychoanalysis shifted the focus from the mind of an individual patient, previously thought to exist "independently and autonomously within the boundaries of the individual," to a model that

sees the mind as inherently social, interactive and interpersonal. In the analytic session, therefore, the therapist pays close attention to subtle ways in which patient and analyst influence, reflect and affect one another. Jessica Benjamin, feminist theorist and psychoanalyst, uses the term "Third" to describe moments when two people join, recognize one another and have a shared experience that transcends the boundaries of each individual.

I find myself wondering about a resemblance of what I'm calling "relational creativity" to the centrality of community in Jewish practice. Torah study and prayer, the intellectual and spiritual religious focal points, are both traditionally preformed within a communal context. The concept of communal prayer may seem paradoxical. It suggests that personal introspection and the ability to experience deep yearning, pain or gratitude are enhanced by praying among others rather than in a contemplative solitude. I understand this as an awareness that the group context enables us to further discover ourselves. Similarly the *hevruta*, the yeshiva study couple, is the prototypical way of Jewish Torah learning suggesting that intellectual understanding is also enhanced when done in association with another.

I find this approach particularly useful to understanding architectural design, which is always a collaborative process. It is practiced within a firm, in conjunction with engineering consul-

analysis of the urban environment that is invisible to non-practitioners. The parallels to religion are right there: reverence for a tradition and its luminaries, a strict system through which meaning is created, and a lifestyle of personal discipline offered up to a greater good. Sound familiar? In this light, it is not surprising that many Jewish architects practice architecture religiously and Judaism culturally, although the Jewish religious tradition does have plenty to say about space. (Think *sukkah*.)

While there are notable examples of women partners in the most renowned firms, these are the exception. The larger rule for both men and women, in Braverman's words, is that "You have to want it very badly." The opportunities require diligent work and a willingness to rise to challenges, combined with a healthy dose of luck. While she is quick not to offer her own path as a formula that would work for everybody, owning a firm was a good match with her personality ("entrepreneurial, independent, and not risk averse"). Being a boss let her take the liberties she needed in order to raise her daughter while tailoring her workload across the years. She needed a solution. And in her role as a professional problem-solver, she found one.

The issue of economic privilege is striking in architecture, where an average starting salary is just over \$44,000 per year, following an investment in schooling that typically runs as long as law school, followed by a training period as long as medical residency. This is simply impossible for many people without financial safety nets, particularly women whose childbearing years (with its costly childcare) often coincide with the early, pivotal period in their careers (with its long hours and meager salaries). Architect Gia Wolff struggled to balance rewarding projects with ones that would pay her bills. She designed and built a *sukkah* for the congregation where she got married so that she could give back to that community. Her ability to pursue both family life and professional life came down to the strength of her support network. When she returned to teaching architecture six weeks after her daughter's birth, her husband set up a crib in his studio. "For women without support, having a family can shift their career trajectory."



Kesher Synagogue, Studio ST Architects with Z-A Studio

In Wolff's case, the risk has paid off. While two Harvard students were protesting the Pritzker Prize's exclusion of Denise Scott Brown, the Harvard Graduate School of Design selected Wolff, who graduated from the school in 2008, for the inaugural year of its newly expanded Wheelwright Prize, a two-year \$100,000 fellowship for a young architect. Wolff believes that the prize committee viewed her non-traditional, interdisciplinary career path as an asset, not a liability. While prize-winning is not a scalable solution for the field, recognizing women's contributions in architecture begins to redress the enormous gender disparity in the visibility of architects' "genius."

MELISSA TAPPER GOLDMAN

tants, it involves the participation of the clients and the problem-solving of the construction team. At times it might be aggressive and adversarial but more often great buildings emerge from a long and successful collaborative partnership. “Thus were the dancers set in motion,” writes Phyllis Lambert in her recent book, *Building Seagram*. It was a mutual dance involving her as the client, Mies Van Der Rohe as the architect and Philip Johnson, who designed the lighting, that gave birth to this New York City landmark skyscraper. The centrality of collaboration in architecture is often overlooked in a culture celebrating and branding “starchitects.” However, there are some who know better. Jeanne Gang, a rising talent in the field, included in her firm’s 2011 book a list of credits, much like one sees in the movies, naming everyone who worked on her office’s projects.

Keith Sawyer’s bestselling book *Group Genius* chronicles many examples, from jazz music to the development of the mountain bike, demonstrating that most inventions are the result of the eponymous “group genius.” Of course not all participants in collaborative work are equal. My relationship with my daughters, from whom I learn so much about myself and about parenting, can often feel very collaborative. Nevertheless, for us to feel safe it’s important that I remain in the role of parent and maintain the mother-child asymmetry. In an office, a collaborative team may have a clear, sole leader. But we now realize that partnerships of equals, where it is impossible to know where one person’s work ends and another’s begins, can also be successful models.

The Pritzker Prize, like other honors, follows a long tradition of rewarding individuals. But when the Pritzker wanted to nominate the Swiss firm of Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron in 2001, they changed the rules to allow that partnership—of two men—to receive the prize jointly. Only this year, in response to the Denise Scott Brown petition, did the American Institute of Architects change its rule for the administration of its Gold Medal Award. In doing so, the A.I.A. announced that the historic change reflects “the changing nature of the practice that has become increasingly collaborative in nature.” (Did I mention that in 105 years no woman has received the A.I.A. Gold Medal Award?)

Collaboration isn’t only an aspect of the innovative team; society itself plays a central role in defining innovation, thereby actively participating in the creative process. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in his book *Flow*, points out that genius and creativity are not objective achievements, but are measured and acknowledged within a specific cultural and historical context. D.S.B. is well aware of this. In an article called “Sexism and the Star System” (1989), she noted that definitions of star quality omit the “fact that stardom is something done to the star by others. Stars cannot create themselves.” When we are touched, excited and interested, it is our experience as viewers, users and



Denise Scott Brown in Las Vegas, 1966.

IMAGE COURTESY OF VENTURI, SCOTT BROWN AND ASSOCIATES, INC.

critics, that makes art into art. In this context one might think about the role of social media. The public heard the call to acknowledge Denise Scott Brown along with Robert Venturi because of Facebook and change.org, tools that allowed thousands to participate in a cultural process that was traditionally reserved for a select group of jury members who author and authorize the historic record of great architects.

The pressure of social media notwithstanding, Lord Palombo, chair of the Pritzker Prize, has refused to include D.S.B. retroactively in the 1991 award. While claiming to be aware that context plays a crucial part in awarding prizes, that prize criteria “may reflect cultural biases that underplay a woman’s role in the creative process,” he forgets that Pritzker Prizes are awarded to architects at a point in their careers that celebrates their past accomplishments while encouraging future growth. Palombo suggests that while “A later jury cannot re-open, or second guess the work of an earlier jury ... Ms. Scott Brown remains eligible for the Pritzker Award.” Does he really mean next year? When D.S.B. will be 83 years old? Doesn’t he realize that her work has already received the prize?

In an oral history, Denise Scott Brown tells of a late-night conversation she had with a German rabbi in Sweden. To her question about what it means to be a Jew he answered, “It’s to have a prophetic mission.” D.S.B. added, “And that stayed with me... as a thought about ‘What does that mean professionally to have a prophetic mission?’ And that might be one of the reasons why my span is broad, why my concerns are to mix social and architectural questions.” It is this prophetic mission that reminds us that the Pritzker committee should undertake to assess its ongoing inclination toward the idea of individual genius. D.S.B. may not see her name entered beside Mr. Venturi’s in the Pritzker roll of honorees. But if the reverberations of this petition finally expose the complex, interconnected and co-created world in which we design and live, and move to an understanding of the relational nature of creativity, that will be its own prize. ■

Esther Sperber founded the award-winning New York-based firm Studio ST Architects in 2003. Born and raised in Jerusalem, she also lectures and writes on architecture and psychoanalysis.

In the Beginning, before Adam v. Eve and Roe v. Wade, there was Merle Hoffman, Abortion Foremother

I came of age in New York City in the 1960s, and I became a child of one of the greatest social revolutions in history, at a time when it became politically possible for women to legally gain and exercise reproductive choice—the power of life and death.

My career started inadvertently while I was still at college, working part-time for a family physician. At the end of each day, I would go into Dr. Gold's office and he'd talk about his impoverished Jewish upbringing on the Lower East Side, the anti-Semitism he experienced, and his medical residency at Bellevue Hospital.

He graphically described to me victims of self-abortion: they were so common, he said, that the night shift came to be called the “midnight express.” Women would start the process by inserting foreign devices into their cervixes at home; when they started to bleed, they came to the emergency room, where physicians would perform a procedure called dilation and curettage, scraping tissue from the uterus—essentially an abortion.

At about the same time, I got one of my first whiffs of feminist activism at Queens College, when Florynce Kennedy came to speak. “If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament,” she said. It was thrilling to hear that kind of unbound language from a podium.

In July 1970, New York State legalized abortion, and Dr. Gold opened Flushing Women's Medical Center [later called Choices], one of the first legal abortion clinics in the country. He asked me to join him in running it. I was 25; I didn't have to think twice.

In the two and a half years between New York's legalization of abortion and January 1973, when the Supreme Court's Roe decision legalized the procedure everywhere, 350,000 women came to New York for abortions, including 19,000 Floridians; 30,000 each from Michigan, Ohio and Illinois; and thousands more from Canada. By the end of 1971, 61% of the abortions performed in New York were on out-of-state residents. New York City became the abortion capital of the nation.

Legal abortion split the world open to the realities of women's lives, laid bare in my counseling rooms. They had made the choice to abort, but they still couldn't believe it was safe and legal.

“I won't be butchered?” they asked. “I won't die?” They were sure they'd be punished. “Can I really do this thing and go on with my life?”

Adapted by Susan Schnur from Intimate Wars: The Life and Times of the Woman Who Brought Abortion from the Back Alley to the Boardroom (The Feminist Press, 2012) by Merle Hoffman.



Merle Hoffman

Two years before *Roe v. Wade*, I opened one of the first legal abortion clinics in the country. I declared my sisters would never return to back-alley butchery.

Their general ignorance regarding women's bodies, health and sexuality was also astounding. “Can I get pregnant again after this abortion?” “Will I still have sexual feelings?” *Our Bodies, Ourselves* had not yet been published; many patients had never had a gynecological exam.

Women described their medical care to me: doctors who told them it was unnecessary to refit their diaphragms after their last childbirth; doctors who refused to insert the I.U.D. when patients asked for them. Women came with pills that were too strong or too weak.

The women came with shame, anxiety, and tangles of questions. “I didn't have an orgasm, how can I be pregnant?” The trail of pregnancies caused by doctors' misinformation or carelessness was endless. I began to call this phenomenon iatrogenic pregnancy.

Most women were examined by a man before they had intercourse with a man. Being a woman meant you were immediately

IMAGE COURTESY OF MERLE HOFFMAN

pathologized. Menstruation, sex, pregnancy, abortion—everything had to be explained by doctors.

Abortion clinics were poised to be platforms for change, for a woman-centered approach to medical care. Acknowledging patients as a class with rights was a vehicle for combatting the victimization of female patients by a generally male medical establishment.

The most radical aspect of abortion—then legal in just a few states—was the potential for women to turn this situation on its head.

Because this was the first time many of our patients had been in a medical space with someone totally focused on them, they spilled out so much of themselves: their relationships with their parents, distress over boyfriends, fears about their future. We helped them articulate to a stranger something they had never verbalized: why they did not want to be pregnant. To us, they admitted that they did not want to be mothers; they wanted, needed, to have an abortion.

Frustrated by the role of physicians as surrogate fathers and deities, I wrote a Patients' Bill of Rights and put it on graphic posters showing God (à la the Sistine Chapel) shooting thunderbolts from the sky at patients who responded by holding up placards: "A patient has the right to question her doctor." "A patient has the right not to be intimidated by the props of medical power—fancy offices, big desks, white coats." "A patient has the right to ask what tests are being performed. Why? What do they cost?" I called my philosophy Patient Power.

Needless to say, it created a scandal. Doctors tore them off the walls.

I saw so much vulnerability: legs spread wide apart; the physician crouched between white, black, thin, heavy, but always trembling, thighs: the tube sucking the fetal life from their bodies, the last thrust and pull of the catheter, then the gurgle that signaled the end of the abortion. Over and over I witnessed women's relief that their lives had been given back to them. It was a kind of born-again experience.

But I also spent hours counseling husbands, lovers, sisters, and mothers full of fury. "Let her really feel the pain so she knows never to do this again." But for the boy or man, there was no censure, never was.

I learned that the reality of abortion resides in "if only." "I would keep this pregnancy *if only*—If only I wasn't 14, I was

married, my husband had a job, I didn't give birth to a baby six months ago, I didn't just get accepted to college, my boyfriend wasn't on drugs, I wasn't on drugs. *If only....*"

But women found a kind of redemption at the clinic: counselors and staff who did not devalue, but supported, them, who demystified, neutralized, accepted. And, of course, redemption in the form of rescue from an unwanted pregnancy.

As time passed, I could see that the movement for women's rights had enjoyed a brief period of public popularity in the early seventies that led to the legalization of abortion, but before women really had the chance to move into their power, the public discussion began to move toward the construction of simplistic, judgmental narratives designed to put women back in their place.

Two sides emerged, as if they were mutually exclusive: the "right to life" or the "right to choose." Each woman's acceptance of her right was threatened by a Greek chorus screaming "murderer" at her for exercising her power. Most women couldn't help but internalize these narrow ways of seeing the issue.

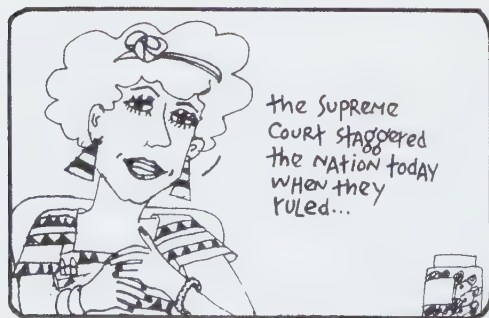
Ironically, the New Right and Moral Majority were also in touch with the fact that abortion empowers women. They understood that to keep women in the traditional roles of wife and mother—and thus prevent wholesale societal upheaval—they had to remove a woman's power to choose.

A study was conducted that revealed a powerful contradiction: the majority of women who came to Choices for abortions did not consider themselves to be pro-choice. They had never imagined themselves in a position where they would decide to have an abortion, an act they considered morally reprehensible even as they waited their turns to be called into the operating rooms. I often asked women who had had abortions if they'd sign petitions, come to rallies, or participate in meetings. Most shook their heads. After their abortions, they just wanted to leave it all behind.

Yet, despite this, they referred their friends and family and came back to the clinic when they needed counseling or care. They demonstrated a quiet solidarity through the necessity of making reproductive decisions. Abortion created "reluctant epiphanies"—the realization that it was not politics but necessity that drives women's choices.

When I found out that I was unintentionally pregnant myself, I wrote in my diary, "For one night I am a mother." The next morning I dressed carefully in a red-and-white suit. What does

one wear to an abortion? There are no traditional costumes like those for funerals or weddings. There is no ritual from one generation of women to another. There are only functional considerations; you wear something that comes on and off quickly and easily.



The steps of the familiar process played out in surreal reversal. Now I was joined to the common experience of my sex. But as I lay on the table I had stood beside to support so many others, I felt irrevocably alone. Strange how I thought of the fetus as female, as if that shared gender gave me a connection.

By the mid-eighties, abortion defenders found themselves firmly in the midst of a backlash. “Pro-choice” came to mean pro-murder. There was a growing tendency to liken abortion to the Holocaust, to compare the private moral decisions of individual women to the wholesale slaughter of Jews. An abortion clinic in Westchester was labeled “Auschwitz on the Hudson,” and anti-abortion protesters raised placards with Nazi insignias in front of clinics. This analogy between Jews and fetuses was an effective way to humanize fetuses, casting them as victims deserving of civil rights.

But for whom, exactly, were they fighting? Few but the most religiously fanatical would wage a hot war in the name of a group of cells. This war was being fought against women, not *for* fetuses.

In 1985 alone, there were approximately 150 attacks against abortion clinics. One of our clinic counselors returned home one evening to find her cat decapitated. Patients were called in the middle of the night with recordings of a childish voice crying, “Mommy, Mommy, why did you kill me?”

In June 1990, Brooklyn’s Bishop Thomas Daily recited the Hail Mary more than 150 times in front of Choices, with 1000 demonstrators. But on the day of their protest, none of our scheduled 100 abortions was canceled. In that era, while Daily was gathering his followers to pray the rosary outside my clinic, I was helping run a sort of underground railroad. Women from states with restrictive abortion laws were traveling to New York to have their procedures. I lowered the fees for out-of-state clients and welcomed them with care and compassion.

Choices grew to see over 500 patients for abortions per week. With my staff of 115, I was basically running a midsize hospital. At our height we performed almost 20,000 abortions per year, over 100 per day, making us one of the largest abortion facilities in the U.S. Nearly 97% of the abortions were done in the first trimester at a cost of \$300.

I was generous with salaries, including my own. I was the only woman owner of a licensed abortion facility in New York, yet my feminist peers often made me feel as though I was doing something wrong. Many felt that a real activist should be struggling financially, or at least working for a nonprofit. How, they wondered, could I be a radical feminist and a successful entrepreneur?

Male abortion doctors faced less opprobrium; the fact that they were making money off abortions did not tarnish them the way it tarnished me. I was a woman, a feminist, a writer, a publisher and an activist, and I was making a hell of a lot of money. Something wasn’t right.

An influx of Russian and other émigrés started coming to the clinic in the 1980s. Abortion was the major form of birth control in the Soviet Union, and many of the women had had 10 or 20 before coming to Choices. At one point, a 35-year-old Russian

woman came to Choices for her 36th abortion. Most Russian gynecologists promoted the idea that the pill caused cancer and they preached the virtues of repeat abortions.

The lack of choice in Russia resulted in an alarming number of abortions performed both legally and illegally. It was impossible to get an accurate number, but it was estimated that between five and 18 million abortions were performed annually there as compared to 1.6 million in the U.S. Acting out my ultimate rescue fantasy, I travelled to Moscow to work on setting up the first feminist medical center—what I called Choices East.

A Hindu Indian woman, 18 weeks pregnant, came into Choices with her husband and two young sons, seeking an abortion. She’d had amniocentesis to insure that there were no fetal

**What does one wear to an abortion?
There are no traditional costumes like
those for funerals or weddings.**

abnormalities, and found there was nothing wrong with her fetus. Why, then, was she here? “It’s a girl,” she told me. “I can’t have a girl. Girls are liabilities.”

I thought of the fetus within her and the primal birth defect it carried. I felt rage that it was my gender that was the least wanted, and despair over the reality that within this act was a denigration, denial, and devaluation of the female self.

The history of abortion is the history of power relations between states and their female populations. When Stalin made abortion illegal, the agenda was to populate Russia with soldiers to counteract Hitler’s rising militarism. Meanwhile, Aryan women in Nazi Germany who were thought to have aborted their fetuses could be punished with the death penalty while those deemed “hereditarily ill” were permitted to have abortions.

Romania offered abortion on request until the decline in fertility instigated a change in policy in 1966; abortion laws enforced by military dictatorships in Chile mandate that women can be jailed for up to five years if they are caught. In China, abortion is an important tool for limiting population growth. In the U.S., the legality of abortion is a wedge issue that flip-flops according to the party in power.

The battlefields are different, but the war is always the same. For women in sexist, authoritarian societies, however, there is often only the harsh reality that sex rarely comes without anxiety, and that the price one often pays for it is high and dangerous.

When Mother Teresa, speaking about abortion, said, “We have created a mentality of violence—massive, propagandized movements that have brought about more than a million and a half unborn deaths every year,” Elie Wiesel didn’t agree with her. He said that the violence he was concerned about was the violence of the abortion debate itself.

I interviewed Wiesel for my magazine *On the Issues* and said to him, “I personally have been compared to Hitler and been called a great murderer.”

He answered, "It is blasphemy to reduce the Holocaust, a tragedy of monumental proportions, to abortion, which is a human tragedy. We need to give the *human proportion* back to the abortion issue, and when we do, we may be able to have much more understanding for the woman who chooses it."

Dr. David Gunn became the first abortion provider killed in the war against abortion, in 1993. After that, there was a



sequence of murders, including that of my friend Dr. George Tiller; for many years I referred women to his clinic for therapeutic late-term abortions. Since 1977, almost 200 abortion clinics have been bombed.

Choices had been harassed with many bomb threats, and I received death threats on a regular basis. I hired guards and upgraded my alarm and security systems. We had regular clinic escorts who would courageously come out every Saturday wearing orange Choices vests, but nothing could change the fact that it would take only one act of violence to destroy our fragile sense of security.

Patients would come in crying after hearing the exhortations from anti-abortion "sidewalk counselors" in front of Choices, and, indeed, a great part of many patients' counseling sessions was spent dealing with these psychological assaults.

At an abortion providers conference in Washington, D.C., I remember finally being handed a button that read, "I'm Pro-Choice and I shoot back." Some years earlier, buttons read, "I'm Pro-Choice and I vote."

When doctors first began to perform abortions they were viewed as progressives, or mavericks. Now they were living in a constant state of P.T.S.D. In order to minimize my vulnerability, I purchased a 20-gauge, pump-action Mossberg shotgun.

A journalist from the Daily News got wind of my purchase and wrote, under the headline Make Her Day, "If you've noticed the Right-to-Life crowds thinning in front of Choices Women's Medical Center in Queens, maybe it's because the abortion clinic's president, Merle Hoffman, just purchased a shotgun."

There was also an avalanche of economic and political attacks. Choices' new landlord made it clear that he had no intention of having an "abortion center" continue to be a tenant in his building. He threatened to "bulldoze" my space if I remained one extra day after the expiration of my lease.

With so little warning, I was forced to liquidate my entire sav-

ings to cover the costs of speeding up construction on our new site. We moved, but the building was sold to a new owner who was anti-abortion—and committed to making my life miserable. His harassment was so severe that I had to call Attorney General Janet Reno's office, which provided armed federal marshals to guard my space during the last few months of construction.

Over the course of two years, the landlord left Choices without heat and air-conditioning, and unfinished roof work resulted

in multiple floods. I had to delay paychecks, lay off staff and suspend all advertising, resulting in a drastic reduction in my patient population. In order to meet payroll and get supplies, I had to stop paying taxes.

I was going from one lawyer to another as I tried to stave off

bankruptcy, keep the builders working, the clinic open, the patients safe, and my own sanity intact.

We spoke with every patient individually prior to her abortion, but it became increasingly clear that abortion could not be extricated from other issues women brought to the clinic—violence at home, abusive relationships, incest, danger on the streets, harassment in the workplace, and economic assaults.

In response to this, we added the Choices Mental Health Center to our clinic. I'd once helped teach women how to scream at the Brooklyn Martial Arts Center. But as Sally Kempton said, "It's hard to fight an enemy who has outposts in your head." Part of the work of our Mental Health Center was to help women feel their power and resist the enemy within as well as without.

"Welcome to my world." My words were published in the New York Post on October 12, 2001, just a little over a month after the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. It was a controversial statement, but it was the truth. I was used to checking my mail for white powder [anthrax] every day. I'd been looking under my car for signs of foul play, my heart beating quickly in anticipation of an explosion, for a decade by then.

I'd been avoiding windows for fear of bullets since Barnett Slepian was gunned down at his kitchen window in front of his wife and children in 1998. I tensed my body every time I walked from my car to Choices.

Saying, "I had an abortion" aloud hasn't gotten any easier since I opened an abortion clinic in 1971—42 years ago. It is ever a tragedy, a necessary evil, something to be kept private and about which to feel ashamed.

The future of abortion still comes down to that fundamental question: When will we have abortion without apology? ■

VISIT LILITH.ORG for more on Jewish women and reproduction.

Ambivalence

When the Abortion on the Table Is Your Own

by DEBORAH EISENBACH-BUDNER with RABBI SUSAN SCHNUR

At the age of 40, partnered and with two small sons, I discovered that I was unintentionally pregnant. We had recently moved cross-country, bought and renovated a house that turned out to be much more derelict than we'd thought, and learned—the hard, lawsuit way—that not everyone is a good human being when they owe you money. My career had been primary in our marriage, but now it was Steven's turn; he was on the cusp of starting a non-profit, a much delayed dream. He had no interest in a third child.

I, on the other hand, always wanted my kids to have a little tribe; I wanted Steven and me to be outnumbered. I also wanted a daughter. But I knew that the timing was very rough. Besides the clarity of Steven's vote, our family life was chronically harried, our marriage compromised by stress, and the two children we already had (only 18 months apart) sorely needed *more* parental attention. On the third hand, none of this was truly life or death; we knew that.

Politically speaking, Steven and I were both staunchly pro-choice. In college, I had minored in Women's Studies and worked for the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, and when I was pregnant with my sons, I used the word “fetus”—never “baby”—in part because I'd experienced the vulnerability of attachment and loss through a miscarriage of my own, but more expressly as a statement of solidarity with women who'd had abortions.

Hearing the prayer while I was having the abortion gave me the strength to bear the inescapable: we needed to end life in order to choose life.

And then, well, this sounds ridiculous, but there was garden-ing, and the issue I always confronted when I needed to weed. I could never pull up unwanted plants without a knot in my stomach and a feeling of moral dread. Who am I to decide what should live and what should die? I thought. *It's in the wrong place. There's too much of it.* Being Jewish, my thoughts turn to Mengele, “selections,” genocides. There are too many of those people. Those people don't belong here. I have a deep ambivalence about human beings' power to determine life or death. As a Jewish educator, I often teach the first two chapters of Genesis, highlighting their polarized standpoints on human beings' purpose on our Earth. In the first chapter, we're here to dominate and control God's creations. But in the second, we are *shomrei adamah*, guardians of all life on this planet.

It was still very early, I was in the first month of my pregnancy, when Steven and I drove downtown to the clinic. We got off the elevator at the ninth floor and were struck by the panoramic

view: vast, majestic mountains, a startling river, rain falling from an otherwise clear-blue sky. Mountains that had been there and will be there forever. We're just piddling specks of dust, I thought, in this giant universe. Suddenly, our worries about having another kid seemed trifling.

"We can do this," Steven said, to my total surprise. "We can have this child. In a few short years, we'll be fine."

The nurse called us in and we discussed the procedure in detail, then asked for a few moments to think. We went back out to the windows, then I pushed the button and the elevator came. We got on. We just couldn't do it.

Classical Jewish texts tell us that it's permissible to abort before 40 days, as the fetus is "mere fluid". I had probably been pregnant around 20 days. But as a woman who had already birthed two children, who had done everything possible to nourish life growing within me, who had facilitated miracles, I felt clear that life had taken hold. To abort was to kill potential life. Spiritually speaking, I had become a person who was pro-life. How complicating.

Six days passed. Steven and I drove back to the clinic. But this time, instead of gazing out the windows, I focused ungenerously on the doctor. He seemed all wrong. He looked to be in his seventies—old—he wore a thick gold chain and a diamond pinky ring—rich—and he was gruff, taciturn and inarticulate.

"Why do you do this?" I asked challengingly. If his motives were suspect, I'd have cause to walk out again.

Instead, the doctor opened up and got emotional, describing experiences he'd had as a medical resident, seeing women dying from illegal, often self-performed, abortions. He was retired, he said; he didn't do this for the money. I was moved. We had a shared sense of humanity.

I opted for local, rather than general, anesthesia, and it hurt like hell. But I wanted to stay present to my choice, both physically and emotionally. I asked the medical team to describe everything they did. When they sucked out the fluid that the embryo was in and prepared to dispose of it, I asked if I could take it home.

A Ritual For Abortion

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ רַחֲמַאִימָא שְׁעוֹזֶרֶת לָנוּ לְבַחֵר חַיִּים.

Brucha Aht Rachamaima, sheh'ozeret lanu, livchor chayyim. Amen.

Bless You, Rachamaima, Compassionate Nurturer of Life, who helps us choose life. Amen.

I was on the abortion table when this prayer just came to me, addressed in the feminine—"Brucha Aht"—to "Rachamaima," a name for God that first birthed itself, 30 years ago, among a small group of women, including me, who were writing one of the first feminist *Haggadot*.

Rachamaima combines three Hebrew words: *rechem* (womb); *rachamim* (compassion; related etymologically to "womb"); and *ima* (mother). Divinity here is a compassionate, female gestator of life. Imagining God in this way came out of a process I called "spiritual activism."

"Sheh-ozeret lanu" ["who helps us"] reflects my theological stance: that there is something "out there" besides us sentient humans. "It" doesn't have a plan, "it" doesn't choose life, but it "helps us"—partners and enables us—to see our job, our role, where we need to go. We know about this "something" beyond us that contributes to the world because it happens *through* us.

The words "You" and "us": During the abortion, my partner kept whispering the prayer in my ear, over and over, the syllables incantatory. "You" and "us" eradicated my feelings of being, somehow, the only one. They connected me to Divinity, to my partner, and to every woman who ever chose to have an abortion or will one day do so.

The prayer's message is radically different from the Kaddish or from the words Jews say in response to a death—"Dayan ha-emet!" ["God is the righteous judge!"]—which don't engage relationally with us, which don't join us in our sorrow. The Kaddish resolves the unresolvable problem of mortality and anguishing loss by simply trumping it ("Let the glory of God be extolled, let His great name be hallowed, let His great name be blessed."). My female prayer, on the contrary, is an embrace.

"Livchor"—"to choose." The first time I went to the abortion clinic, I couldn't go through with it and left with my pregnancy still intact. During the six days that followed, I came to terms with the awesome charter of my choice. Okay, this is inescapable, I told myself. I can't pretend I'm not doing it. "Pro-choice," "pro-life"—I was taking responsibility for my power.

—D.E.-B. WITH S.S.

"It's against the law," the nurse said, but then set it aside for me.

"This is such a big choice," I had told the team. "So sad."

As I cried in pain, Steven cried, too. So did the doctor I had wanted to hate.

Before our first trip to the clinic, I had looked for Jewish prayers or rituals that sanctified abortion, but the little I found addressed only losses that followed “medically necessary” procedures. I knew I needed to bring a sense of *kedusha*, of blessing and wholeness, to the abortion while I was experiencing it, but even as I lay on the operating table squeezing Steven’s hand so hard that his knuckles turned white, I was unable to access that *kedusha*. Then something happened.

My presentness to the physical pain, my acknowledgment of the power I was assuming through my decision to end potential life, and my understanding that I was not alone in this journey ... coalesced, without my help, into words:

Brucha Aht Rachamaima, sheh’ozeret lanu, livchor chayyim. Amen.

[Bless You, Rachamaima, Compassionate Nurturer of Life, who helps us choose life. Amen.]

I said the words to Steven and asked him to whisper them over and over in my ear. To me, a *bracha*—a prayer—represents the pinnacle of presentness. Then I asked for the gas (I was so “present” that I gave my body permission to have an easier ride), and the pain became bearable.

Only later did I think more about this, about how the prayer had self-birthing. To resolve my ambivalence, I had needed to radically accept the moral gravity and imperfection of my choice, and I would now live a little bit injured—like Jacob who perennially limped after wrestling the angel.

Did the language of the *bracha* come to me once I’d really taken in the responsibility for my choice, did it simply name and confirm it, or did the *bracha*, itself gestating, spur my process of

I thought about Deuteronomy 30, the verses that describe the crazy accessibility of Torah, the idea that the mitzvah of living according to Torah “is not in the heavens or across the seas, that someone *else* must go and get it for you.” No, it resides in our bodies—“in our own mouths and in our own hearts to observe it.” Judaism needs to be embodied *in us* to be actionable and lasting, and each of us must filter her ethical choices through the uniqueness of her own beating heart and bleating mouth.

“And so I place before you life and death, blessing and curse,” the Deuteronomic text continues: “*Choose life that you may stay alive—you and your seed.*” I was blown away. I was acting from a place where all my parts were present, not from a theoretical place across oceans and seas. I am acting wholly, I thought; I have never been more intimate with a mitzvah.

We took the container home, dug a small hole under a camellia shrub, in bloom in January, and poured the embryonic fluid into the soil. The camellia sits against a fence behind the swing set that we built for our kids, and it’s sometimes obscured by other plants.

“*Brucha aht Rachamaima...*,” we said. “Bless you...who helps us choose life.”

All of this happened nine years ago, and since then I have observed an informal *yahrzeit*, just by myself, beside the camellia that sits over against the fence behind the swing set that we built for our children.

“This is the time of year we did it”—I say something like that. “There was a potential for life that we stopped. I kind of wonder a little who this person could have been....” I don’t observe a particular day; I just wait until I see a flower.

In 2009, our family of four went to Kazakhstan for three months, and by the time we were ready to come home, the four of us were five. We had adopted a baby girl. Before settling on Kazakhstan for the adoption, I knew Suri was out there; we just had to figure out where *exactly* she was.

Her brothers say things like, “She’s the best thing that ever happened to us,” and, “There could not be a better person to have joined our family.”

But when I watch her swinging up into the sky bursting with joy, in just that spot, I feel a sadness borne of experience and the passing of time. I face the excruciating understanding that when we choose life, we sometimes choose loss as well.

Choosing to adopt and then finding our daughter was a long, arduous process fraught with tremendous risk, doubt and desire. But it was our way of choosing life, and it would not have happened if not for the first choice. ■

Deborah Eisenbach-Budner has worked for two decades as a Jewish education director. She has a special commitment to ritual innovation, including the spirituality of parenting and other everyday occupations.

Making this decision can empower you elsewhere, too.

accepting its burden? Maybe hearing the *bracha* whispered, over and over, gave me strength to bear the weight of the inescapable: we needed to end life in order to choose life.

I felt grateful for those few quiet words that breathed soothing sense into what I was enacting—I was, after all, integrating the stories of Genesis 1 and 2 with this abortion; at the same time, dominating and safeguarding Creation. In my experience, prayers are usually prods, shepherds’ crooks that aim to gather up a moment. But this *bracha* was what *was*; there was no need to gather.

Steven and I were choosing life: shoring up our precarious marriage, our tattered family, committing to what was most holy in our relationships. We were acting as pro-life as we knew how.

There’s been such a silencing around the life-and-death power that a woman wields when she chooses to abort a fetus. Laying on the operating table, the doctor and nurse still at work, I felt the liberation that comes from making that power sacred.

Generation I.V.F.

Making a Baby in the Lab: 10 Things

by MIRIAM ZOLL

At age 50, I am an official member of Generation I.V.F., having grown up after the Pill and Baby Boomer feminists revolutionized women's reproductive choices and lives. We watched as millions of American women infiltrated formerly closed-to-females professions, and as home and office politics, the economy, and relations between the sexes radically shifted.

My generation also came of age alongside reproductive technologies: in-vitro fertilization (I.V.F.), frozen sperm, donor eggs, and surrogacy. I vividly remember reading front-page stories about the first test-tube baby born in Britain (in 1978) and about the first donor-egg baby born (in 1984). These advances were so extraordinary that my girlfriends and I began to believe that almost anything would be possible by the time we were ready to have kids...that is, if we chose to have kids.

I can recite from memory the names and ages of the celebrities who first seemed to beat the biological clock: Photographer Annie Leibovitz (twins at 52), supermodel Cheryl Tiegs (baby at 52), actress Geena Davis (twins at 48). Now there are hordes more, and some of these have revealed they used I.V.F.: Mariah Carey, Celine Dion, Courtney Cox, J-Lo, and, it seems, just about every other 40-plus female in Hollywood.

Bombarded by these relentless endorsements for older motherhood, many middle-class, educated, Gen-I.V.F. women like myself started thinking, "Wow, science is finally beating Mother Nature." We reassuringly told each other, "It's okay to delay motherhood while we pursue our careers. If we run into trouble, well, there are always fertility treatments." Science and technology were our New God.

My own fertility story has four chapters.

Chapter One: Ambivalent about motherhood and thrilled to be ensconced in a meaningful career, I married in my mid-thirties and five years later started trying to make a baby the old-fashioned way.

Chapter Two: a four-year odyssey into assisted reproductive technology (A.R.T.) (which 99 percent of the time means I.V.F.). With A.R.T., the sperm and egg are handled *outside of*

the womb (A.R.T. does not include straight hormone therapy or intrauterine insemination). Most A.R.T. requires very expensive injections, via needles to the abdomen, thigh or buttock, aimed at controlling your body's hormones and stimulating your egg production. Notoriously, they can also fuel horrible mood swings and alter your personality.

During the years I underwent I.V.F., I met women so addicted to the hope the science offered that they'd endured as many as 18 rounds of treatment. My husband Michael and I abandoned the I.V.F. treadmill after four failed cycles, including one emotionally devastating miscarriage and another in which my ovaries produced no eggs at all.

For the most part, this \$4-billion-a-year biotech industry is not invested in providing appropriate patient education that can help women and couples determine when to cease treatments, or support them in coming to terms with the indescribably painful fate of their biological childlessness. Still reaching for the stars ourselves, Michael and I continued on to *Chapter Three: The Donor Egg Phase*.

At this point a third party was introduced into the sacredness of the conception process, deeply challenging not only our values, but also our core sense of identity. We talked endlessly about ethics, spirituality, and the excruciating realization that we were actually considering *buying* another woman's eggs, commodifying her.

Still, sad to say, despite trepidation, disabling bouts of insomnia, and self-flagellation, our obsession to procreate prevailed. Slowly but surely, we became that thing: Fertility Junkies. We began working with a donor egg agency, spending endless hours online, often surreptitiously logging on at 3 a.m., addictively "shopping" for the perfect egg mother; maybe one who would look a little bit like me.

After several more months of tears and insomnia, we chose an attractive 21-year-old who then had to undergo rigorous testing. When the nurse finally called to report that this donor was infertile, we were stunned.

"Okay," Michael and I told each other, "This is an omen from the universe telling us to stop." But we didn't. Instead we

I Wish Someone Had Told Me

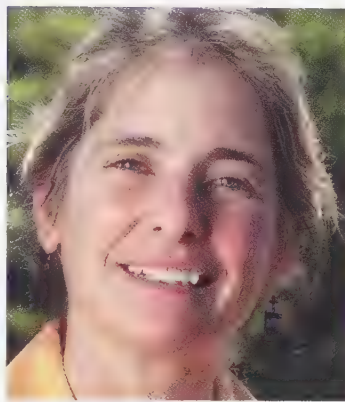
started fanatically trolling the Internet again. We found another seemingly good fit—a 28-year-old mother who had donated to another couple only six months earlier. The clinic synchronized our hormone levels and prepared her ovaries to generate quality eggs and my uterus to develop the kind of lining that an embryo (or two) wants to call home. But literally one day before the embryo transfer was scheduled to take place, much to our incomprehension and shock, the doctor called to inform us that none of our donor's dozen eggs had fertilized.

"There is something obviously wrong with her," he said, lending his industry's own strange brand of support. "Given the drugs she was taking, she should have produced many more eggs and they should have fertilized. I would not recommend using her again, but I do hope you will try another donor cycle. You are a perfect candidate."

At that point, maimed and almost immobilized by grief, I slunk into a depression that kept me in bed for months. Somehow, I don't know how, we initiated *Chapter Four* of our saga: the path to parenthood through adoption. I felt intensely Jewishly-identified during this period, ruminating about baby Moses and all the women who collectively strategized to save him from death and facilitate his adoption: his sister Miriam (my namesake), his mother Yocheved, and his adoptive mother, Bithia, Pharoah's daughter.

Michael's and my seven-year-long journey to have a child ended the moment we laid eyes on our newborn son, Sammy. As he snuggled next to his birth mother in a hospital bed, a maternal force as great as a tsunami welled up inside of me, and I gave thanks that he had finally arrived through the spiritual cocoon of my long-recited prayers. At the same time, I couldn't quite comprehend that he was actually "my son" and I was now "his mother." In an instant, we all assumed new identities that would bind us together for life.

Like wide-eyed pioneers, Michael and I had ventured into a wildly unregulated and subterranean branch of medicine. Most of the information circulating about I.V.F. predominantly focuses on its *successes*; there is virtually no counterbalance to



Like wide-eyed pioneers, Michael and I had ventured into a wildly unregulated branch of medicine.

inform us about high failure rates, its devastating effect on couples, or its bioethical conundrums. So herein, abridged, are 10 things I wish someone had told me before I embarked on my ride through hell.

1. You Will Probably Be Physically and Emotionally Traumatized. I found that the side-effects of the drugs, the constant prodding and probing below my hips, and the repeated failures, miscarriage, and devastatingly dashed hopes brought me to the point where I sought treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (P.T.S.D.).

A study by Allyson Bradow, *Primary and Secondary Infertility and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, confirms that women who experience failed fertility treatments often exhibit symptoms of P.T.S.D.. Close to 50 percent of 142 participants in Bradow's study met the official criteria for the disorder; that's about six times higher than its prevalence in the general population.

Those of us who bump into age-related infertility end up confronting two tragedies: the loss of our deep primal desire to birth a baby and the realization that we guzzled the Kool-Aid: we built our entire "women-can-finally-have-it-all" adult life on an illusion.

2. Your Sexuality Will No Longer Belong to You. In order to endure the physical and emotional strain of multiple I.V.F. cycles, you will eventually detach from your body and your sex drive. This is almost inevitable, as the doctors will control, through drugs and technology, what used to be controlled by Nature.

By the time I reached The Donor Egg Phase, sex equaled stress. It meant needles and Petri dishes, stirrups and vaginal probes. It was associated with disappointment and guilt and pain. Most nights I cried myself to sleep.

3. You Will Blame Yourself. In 2012, the European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology reported that the global A.R.T. failure rate was as high as 77 percent. In the U.S., treatments fail close to 60 percent of the time among women younger than 35, and 88 to 95 percent of the time among women older than 40. This glaring omission of information from most mainstream media results in women blaming themselves for failed cycles rather than understanding that this fragile science has consistently missed its mark two-thirds of the time or more since 1978.

In my case, as cycle after cycle failed, I buried myself in a tomb of self-blame so disabling that I was unable to work for one full year. *It was my fault* my ovaries weren't producing enough quality eggs. *It was my fault* we waited too long. It was my fault we had a miscarriage. I was an expert when it came to contraception, but I was embarrassed about my ignorance regarding reproduction, and angry with myself for how blindly I entrusted doctors to work their magic in a laboratory. I was a failure in every way.

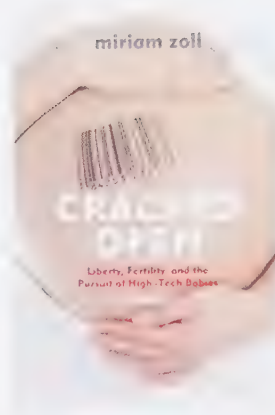
If I had only tried harder....

Fortunately, former infertility patients and advocates are beginning to talk about all of this publicly, and the first independent forum to crack open the myths and hidden realities of infertility and the power of science to reverse it, *The Cycle: Living A Taboo*, took place in New York City in September 2013.

4. The Absence of the Sacred Will Deplete You. Fertility clinics and their staff are focused on manufacturing embryos, *not* on counseling patients compassionately after miscarriages, stillbirths and negative pregnancy tests. I often wondered what the doctors and nurses thought about me, the human being, as I lay on the gurney, and when I eagerly signed up for another cycle only days after my miscarriage. Did they feel sorry for my desperation, which kept them employed? Hooked into stirrups, did I have a face, a husband and a life, or was I just another older woman trying to have a kid?

A few months after our second donor was diagnosed as being infertile, we finally, for the first time, sat in a room with other couples in the same situation. A minister's wife told the tale of how she'd adopted four children whose mother could no longer care for them.

Only minutes into her story, the dam inside of me broke loose and a river of tears began streaming down my face. This was the first occasion since we'd begun the arduous baby-making process that we were communing with people who actually talked about the sacredness of the path toward parenthood. Never once dur-



I.V.F. treatments fail 88–95% of the time for women older than 40. Why hasn't this word gotten out?

ing treatments had clinic staff even mentioned the beauty or spirituality of creating and stewarding new life.

5. Treatments Involve Health Risks. In a branch of medicine that is still very much experimental, I injected into my body whatever drugs the doctors thought might help me become pregnant. I am an educated woman, a researcher and writer by trade, a feminist, and yet I became an obedient guinea pig.

When I finally stopped treatments and was invited to join the board of *Our Bodies Ourselves*, I learned that there is scant evidence-based research about the *long-term* effects of treatments on women's and infants' health. Existing data does show an increased risk between certain fertility interventions and breast, ovarian and endometrial cancers, among other side effects, and a 26 percent increased risk of birth defects in I.V.F. babies. The common practice of implanting multiple embryos is known to pose serious health risks to mothers and infants, including pre-term delivery, low birth weights, and costly hospitalizations.

The effect of treatments on egg donors has been even less studied, yet we do know that side effects can include blood clotting, infertility, and ovarian hyper-stimulation syndrome, and in some rare instances, death. Potent drug regimens can create as many as 30 to 60 eggs in one cycle, as opposed to the solo egg a woman naturally produces during her period. (You can learn more in the film *Eggsploitation* and from the group *We Are Egg Donors*.)

On the positive side, there is now the Infertility Family Research Registry (ifrr-registry.org) that invites women going through A.R.T. to submit information about their health and that of any offspring. Of the roughly 500 clinics in the U.S., however, fewer than 100 have signed up to promote it.

6. Treatments Costs a Fortune. Be Prepared to Confront Your Privilege. One average I.V.F. cycle in the United States costs between \$12K and \$15K; a donor-egg cycle, \$30K; and surrogacy anywhere from \$75K to \$150K. Around the globe, the greatest cause of infertility is untreated sexually transmitted diseases; these hit poor women the hardest. Needless to say, fertility treatments are largely unavailable to them.

Only 15 U.S. states offer insurance policies that cover fertility procedures, compared to Britain, Israel and many countries in Europe that subsidize some citizens' fertility treatments. In Sweden, France and Italy, single women, and lesbians and gay men, are often barred from accessing them at all.

7. Fertility Clinics Are Big Business. Most clinic staff wear two incompatible hats: a medical one and a business one, so this means their advice might include steering you towards trying new technologies and drugs. Our reproductive endocrinologist told us honestly that our chances of I.V.F. success were low, but he also said, "It only takes one good egg to make a baby." Michael and I were awash in yearning and denial; the doctor knew that. "New techniques and protocols are constantly being developed," he said. "*You just never know what can happen.*"

The world's first fertility company, Virtus Health, went public this year to the tune of almost half a billion dollars. Its CEO is quelling investors' fears that improvements in A.R.T. might mean fewer cycles for clients. Uh-oh—dwindling revenues.

8. Fertility Clinics Are a "Wild West." There is only one piece of U.S. federal legislation, loosely enforced, that requires clinics to self-report their annual success rates: the 1992 Fertility Clinic Success Rate and Certification Act. Apart from this, the industry operates below the public radar.

Activities that are stunningly unregulated include: implanting multiple embryos that may increase rates of success but also endanger women's and infants' health; engineering and selling anonymous embryos in the marketplace; prescribing off-label drugs that have not been approved by the F.D.A. for fertility use; marketing donor embryos or donor egg treatments to post-menopausal women; and offering expensive procedures—such as egg freezing—that have no proven track record in efficacy or safety.

The hype around egg freezing is a good example of the clinics going rogue. This newest technology is being marketed as though it's as revolutionary and reliable as the Pill. I know older women who view it as a kind of magical insurance policy that will ensure their chances to birth babies safely when they are older. But there is virtually no long-term, evidence-based research to back up these claims.

9. Your Treatment Options May Exploit Poor Women. Patients wrestling with the pain of infertility and considering options like surrogacy and egg donation need to understand and connect the dots between their treatment choices and these women's lives. Take a look at the recent documentaries *Made in India* and *Show Me the Baby Bump, Please*. Many surrogates, in India and elsewhere, are illiterate, extremely poor, and often not informed about what they've consented to. They can be separated from their children for up to a year, relegated to "surrogacy dormitories," and, if their pregnancy fails, compensation and follow-up health care may be withheld. As health consumers, patients can plan an important role promoting greater health and human rights protections for all parties involved in reproductive technology treatments.

Commercial surrogacy and egg vending are booming businesses. As someone who has studied the link between poverty and gender, I would much rather see women and girls acquire economic security through better access to educational, constitutional human rights protections, and sustainable employ-

ment opportunities, *not* by a singular focus on their gonads and wombs.

10. You Will Dislike Yourself. Entering the world of A.R.T. will challenge you to reassess much of what you thought you knew about yourself. Long-held beliefs about right and wrong begin to flake off your psyche like old paint on a windblown house. Moral dilemmas about eugenics and cloning invade your dreams.

For me, deciding to use donor eggs was much more difficult than choosing I.V.F. I was averse to how unnatural it was, and I felt deep shame for my conspicuous conception, paying another woman to risk her health and possibly deplete her own egg reserves on my behalf. How and why do these young women decide to sell their eggs to someone like me? How does a donor agency determine that one woman's eggs are worth \$8,000, but another's only \$5,000? Blonde, svelte donors seem to get paid more than brunette, overweight ones. And Caucasian, Asian, and African-American eggs carry very different price tags. Ivy League egg donors with high S.A.T. scores and 36-24-26 body measurements have been paid as much as \$100,000 for their eggs.

While searching for a donor, Michael and I were aghast at how judgmental we became. *This one's eyes are too close together. I don't like her teeth. She looks bi-polar. She looks uneducated.*

Like any protective parent, you want to be discriminating when choosing the genetic code and physical traits of someone whose egg will form half the D.N.A. structure of your potential offspring; that's understandable. Still, it did not sit well. And even though we are now the proud and grateful parents of the most delicious little four-year-old ever, our A.R.T. ordeal may have scarred us for life.

What's redemptive for me now is my mission to reveal the hidden side of treatments, and to caution women intent on birthing babies to avoid making the same irrevocable decisions so many educated, middle-class women in Gen-I.V.F. made when we delayed childbearing. Since infertility often correlates with higher educational levels, Jewish women are the group that has been hardest hit. If you're reading this, you doubtless know some of us. You may be one of us.

There's a global epidemic of misinformation about the age when women's fertility naturally declines and about the power of modern medicine to reverse this. If you have experienced treatments, or know someone who has, I invite you to cast off your silence and contribute to expanding an open and honest consumer-driven discussion about these life-altering technologies. ■

Miriam Zoll is an award-winning writer and author of Cracked Open: Liberty, Fertility and the Pursuit of High-Tech Babies, founding co-producer of the Ms. Foundation for Women's original "Take Our Daughters To Work Day," and a board member of Our Bodies Ourselves and Voice Male Magazine.

VISIT LILITH.ORG for more about Jewish women's eggs and fertility concerns.

Don't Say "VAGINA"

The 10 Most Ridiculous New Anti-Abortion Laws (the 11th probably coming to your neighborhood soon)

by SARAH ERDREICH

Forty years ago, *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in the U.S., justifying it as a "right to privacy" under the 14th Amendment. There is no express right to privacy in the Constitution, however, so women's right to abort remains scarily vulnerable. In the last few years, poking strategic holes in women's access to abortion seems to have become a national sport.

In 2011, states enacted 92 laws hobbling women's access to abortion. In 2012, 43 restrictive laws were passed. Our current year promises to be a whopper: lawmakers have already introduced more than 300 anti-abortion measures.

One out of three women in the U.S. will have an abortion. That's a stunning number. It suggests that at least some women out there are having their abortions in stealth and then resuming their smiley pro-life personae. Currently, 87% of counties in the US lack abortion providers. This wallops poorer women, since you need resources—time, money, and transportation—to be able to travel to a distant abortion clinic.

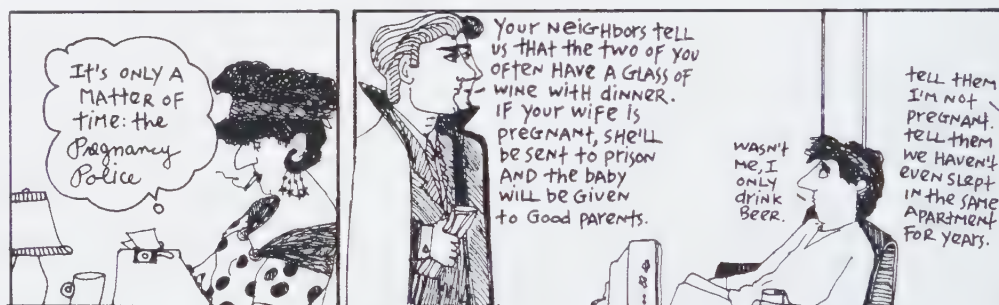
The mountain of anti-choice laws grows ever higher: mandatory waiting periods; mandatory ultrasounds, some of which must be done via vaginal probe; measures that restrict medical students from learning how to perform abortions; building codes that make freestanding abortion clinics adhere to the same strict standards as hospitals. Anti-choice activism has become enviably creative.

Given all this *mishugas*, it was hard to pick the 10 most outrageous recent anti-choice laws, but here goes. They're in no particular order, and I've tacked on an especially insane dishonorable mention.

1. South Dakota has passed a 72-hour waiting period before you can get an abortion. This excludes weekends and holidays.
2. Politicians in North Carolina snuck abortion restrictions into a law focused on motorcycle safety regulations.
3. A Mississippi law specifies that abortion clinics be "located in an attractive setting."
4. A South Carolina law states that clinics must ensure that their "outside areas"

9. In Michigan, pro-choice Representative Lisa Brown was banned from speaking on the House floor after she uttered the word "vagina" in the legislature.
10. In Texas, a state lawmaker is attempting to require women to take a course about adoption before they can choose to abort.

Dishonorable mention goes to anti-choice activists in Wichita, Kansas, who are using their own picketing of abortion



be "free of grass that might serve as a haven for insects."

5. Wisconsin governor Scott Walker signed a bill that regulates what physicians are allowed to say to women seeking abortions (a clear infringement of the relationship between patient and physician).
6. North Dakota has banned abortion after a fetal heartbeat can be detected, which can be as early as the sixth week of pregnancy.
7. Lawmakers are attempting to classify the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics as a "state agency"—in order to prevent medical residents from getting trained to do abortions.
8. A wide-ranging Ohio bill seeks to remove public funding from rape crisis centers that inform raped women of their option to abort.

clinics to close an abortion clinic! The clinic in question, South Wind Women's Center, is located at the site of slain physician George Tiller's former clinic. By claiming that their own demonstrations are disruptive to the community—and citing instances of anti-choice harassment like graphic signs displayed where children can see them, and friction between clinic escorts and themselves—protestors are trying to get the clinic's neighborhood zoned as "non-business" so that South Wind will have to close.

As it says in *Ethics of the Pro-Choice Mothers* 2:20: "The day is short, the task abundant, the price high, and the Mistress of the House says get to work." ■

Sarah Erdreich is the author of the new book *Generation Roe: Inside the Future of the Pro-Choice Movement*.

Not Generation Roe, Not Generation I.V.F. Meet the Twentysomethings of Generation Midwife

JESSICA ANGELSON talks to SUSAN SCHNUR



SUSAN SCHNUR: You're 29, you went to Oberlin and Stanford for undergrad, you worked at a non-profit in China for three years, largely on H.I.V. and malaria prevention. Now you're at Columbia University's School of Nursing, studying to be a nurse-midwife. Help us connect the dots.

JESSICA ANGELSON: I thought I'd have a career in public health, but it wasn't satisfying day-to-day, so I started thinking about clinical work. I'd always had an interest in reproductive justice. In China, I trained as a birth doula—I speak Mandarin—then discovered that midwifery was a modern profession. A brilliant 70-year-old midwife mentored me.

S: You grew up in an elite world, attending a well-heeled private school. Doesn't that class perspective valorize becoming an M.D., not a nurse?

J: Growing up, I didn't know any nurses. There was an ingrained judgment about what constitutes an appropriate professional choice. If you're a doctor, people are impressed. "Oh, you have a doctor in the family...."

I researched obstetrics, shadowed physicians, and despairingly witnessed a culture that objectified women's bodies and pathologized reproduction. The obstetric approach to a pregnant woman's care is, "We need to perform X or Y procedure. With these data points, we cut your abdomen open...."

Instead of normal labor, I saw a barrage of strangers come into a woman's room, inserting their fingers into her without introducing themselves, without consent, without explaining why they would do such a thing. She's placed in such a position of non-agency that they make it possible to cut into her vagina without her permission or even her knowledge, to speak to her like a child.

I knew immediately that this wasn't how I wanted to be with women. Reproductive processes are not necessarily pathologies, but they may require assistance. I looked at the culture of medicine and felt it was frankly toxic to women's health.

S: You call reproductive choice the linchpin of women's lives.

J: When I was 14, I declared I was a feminist. I also had a visceral fascination with the idea that women were growing other human beings inside their bodies. When I went to college, I realized I'd not had a teen pregnancy. Then I made it to the *huppah* without children. I had access to birth control cheaply and freely; I am continually thankful for this privilege.

This isn't fashionable to say, but women's liberty is dependent on their ability to control their fertility. Having a child you don't want changes everything: educational opportunities, economic reality, relationships you're forced into, where you live, status in the workplace. It's the linchpin of all aspects of your life.

I just sat through a lecture on the hundreds of ways you can control fertility: three types of I.U.D.s; birth control inserted into your fallopian tubes; scores of different birth control pills; birth control for men; hormonal implants. It's mind-boggling. The ability to not become pregnant is central in the lives of many women and it's underappreciated.

S: What's your ideal midwifery practice?

J: The dream is an independent, freestanding health center with a few other midwives. We'll be embedded in a community where people know and trust us over the course of their lives. We'll care for everyone from teenagers to menopausal women. We'll attend births at the center or in a woman's home, and follow women for hospital care if there's an acute situation. We'll have great consultative relationships with physicians. We'll play a role in women's lives: providing education, helping them decide if, how, and when they want to form families. Because of our commitment to providing women with whatever healthcare they need, we'll do abortions.

S: Any Jewish inflection?

J: Midwifery has been part of the reproductive justice movement, in which Jewish women have been consistently active. Fully one-third of the students in my midwifery class are Jewish. We think in these terms: What's critical for women? How do we improve women's status, women's lives? Jewish physicians and midwives are disproportionately abortion providers, which may reflect the traditional Jewish view that, particularly early on, a fetus is not a full-fledged, autonomous human being.

Traditional Judaism is very focused on the body: family purity laws, the very raw nature of circumcision.... Not all peoples are as intensely interested in the body's goings-on. Claiming our role in this conversation and in modern healthcare is consistent with Jewish women's worldview.

I feel very at home as a Jewish woman becoming a midwife. In a different time or place, I might have become a physician, but in present-day America it would be philosophically inconsistent for me. I won't be Dr. Angelson, OB/GYN; I'll only make half the money; my choice marginalizes me. The transcendent experience of being with a woman as a midwife makes it worthwhile. ■

TO LEFT

fiction by LEE CONELL

That first night, the most interesting part of my Hebrew language class is learning why people are taking a Hebrew language class. “You’re too old to be forced by your parents,” our teacher—jowly, balding—says. “So what on earth are you doing here?” The seven of us stare back at him as if we speak no language at all. His round face under the flickering fluorescent lights glows like a fleshy moon.

“I mean, come on. Why are you spending your Thursday evenings in some dingy downtown community center? Why are you here when you’re surrounded by bars and boutiques and all those tall shiny buildings?”

Easy enough to translate what he really means to say: Why are we learning about the old when we are hemmed in by the new? Why are we interested in the basics of a tongue our parents did not care to have us learn?

“Tell me your name,” says the teacher, “is what I’m asking. And tell too why you are here.”

All the students in the class are like me: women in their twenties or maybe early thirties. So I expect mostly youthful idealistic responses to the “why are you here” question. Connecting to our roots, I expect. Understanding our past. Keeping that past alive.

But the reasons the others offer up are more practical. Several of the women have partners who want their children to grow up speaking Hebrew. One is studying foreign affairs. Another has just recently returned from Israel, where she admits to getting lost, unable to read any signs. Then the teacher points to me and says, “Well? You?”

“My grandmother’s ninetieth birthday is coming up, and she wants me to speak to her in Hebrew a little. As a gift.”

Everybody coos at my lie and I sense the false words lodge, undigested, in my stomach. I imagine the fib sitting there like a watermelon seed and I feel that little-kid fear: What if it grows big inside me?

Then we are all quiet again, and waiting, and our teacher says, “I always ask the intent on the first day. Why? Because

RIGHT



Hebrew is an intentional language.” But he doesn’t explain what that actually means. He instead passes out an old and poorly Xeroxed handout full of letters and dots I can’t understand. We spend the rest of the class ululating vowels and grunting consonants together.



It’s true I have a grandmother turning ninety, but she could care less what language I use to talk to her. These days she speaks only the language of her personal past, a past nobody else can share. Her sisters and brothers and close friends are dead, and the older she gets, the more the living fade too. She no longer touches my hair or uses the Yiddish terms of endearment she once called me by (“*shayne maydeleh*,” she’d trill). After I tell her I have finished my university courses, after I tell her I have been accepted into graduate school, she does not react at all. I go sometimes to visit her with my mother, but I become exhausted watching my mother’s attempts to hide the fact that she is nervous and trembling and wants to be home. I prefer going by myself.

One day my grandmother calls me Ruth. I have become a sign for her sister, who died young during the war. It is a version of *Ruth* who is made flesh when I walk through the doorway of the nursing home, a version of Ruth who sits by her bed, and I myself am the ghost.

When my grandmother’s ninetieth birthday approaches, I sign up to take Hebrew classes, not Yiddish. I am not interested in becoming *Ruth*. I am not interested in mastering my grandmother’s childhood language. No, the language I want to learn is the language of an older authority. I am interested in making appeals in the proper way, in the way I believe has the greatest chance of being heard. I want to ask for help in getting my grandmother to see me properly once more, and I want to ask in the right way.

I have tried asking in English but have grown embarrassed by the words I repeat again and again, like a child.



Bring her back. Bring her back as she was.

The refrain seems too sentimental, my only tongue too new for a plea so ancient.



The second class goes much like the first. The fluorescent lights flicker on the floor. We read from more handouts, fuzzy black ink on bright white typing paper. We learn new letters. Class participation has appeared purely voluntary, so I'm taken aback when the teacher calls on me to read a line. My shoulders jump a little and as soon as I begin to read, he stops me.

"No, no," he says, shaking his round head and smiling a little. "You're going the wrong way. Remember. Right to left."

I've made a flustered absentminded mistake, but for a moment I want to argue with him anyway. Left to right. Doesn't that seem more logical? Isn't that, after all, the direction time flows? I'm stuck on the timelines created in elementary school history lessons, timelines that stretched across the board with a definitive force. I wonder, then, if my grandmother sees time the other way around. Perhaps she believes her granddaughter turning into her sister is the right order of things, the proper direction. Perhaps in the language she speaks now, time flows backwards.

The teacher clears his throat and I blink hard.

"Don't worry," he says. "Don't look so worried. Just try again. But the right way this time. From the *right* side," he adds, rolling his eyes.



When I stop by the nursing home to see my grandmother that week, she looks me right in the eye with such clarity that I believe she is back to her old self. She nods, once, twice. Then she falls asleep. I spend the next twenty minutes watching her. I know that when she looks at me, she may see dozens of family faces from her past, a multitude dead and vanished, and I search her slackened face for that same multitude. I should, at least, see signs

of my mother and of myself. But the longer I look the stranger her face becomes. After a while her face does not remind me of other humans that I know, but of other *things*. A crumpled piece of paper. A bunched up washcloth. A mess of plaster on old wall. A wrinkled, caved-in peach. The longer I look, the more I believe we will never know how to speak to one another again.

I leave before she can wake up.



The third class, our teacher doesn't show. After fifteen minutes' waiting, the receptionist peeks her head in through the doorway, clutching the wall with one hand. She tells us our teacher has had a family emergency but the session should continue according to schedule next week. Then she disappears. We can hear her heels clicking down the hall.

I'm about to spring to my feet and get out of there, when the young foreign affairs student says, "Well, I guess we could review some of the material on our own?"

We stare at her.

"I mean," she says, shrugging, "we came all the way out here already, didn't we? And we've all got the packets, right?"

We do.

"So, why not? Why don't we just start reviewing day one?" The student has already adopted a new singsong teacher voice.

Maybe that's why we listen to her. We adopt that same singsong voice, all of us, as we read that first page, which is devoted to introducing Alef and a little dash, combined to make an "ah" sound. The sign for that sound is written dozens of times down the page. "Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah," we repeat together.

"The pedagogy for this handout is about as old as the language," says the girl who got lost in Israel, interrupting our singsong. We laugh a little guiltily; we're still not sure how much we're supposed to be looking or listening to each other, now that the teacher is not directing and managing our time. But someone knows to say, "Let's go on," so we go on together. We read the sound out loud,

every time it appears, again and again and again. When we finish the page for the Alef and the dashes and the dots, we move right on to the Bet, without the short breather our teacher would ask for, without the space to integrate. Halfway down the second page, we are hardly reading at all. We are chanting.

When we are done with that page, we again move directly to the next letter, not wanting to break whatever fragile communication we are creating together: a spell, a prayer, a nonsense poem. We stay in that room until our time is up, not speaking, just making sounds.



I go to see my grandmother the next day. She is awake and when she sees me, that moment of clarity occurs again. She looks straight at me and seems to know me well.

I ask her how she's feeling.

She shakes her head but says nothing.

"Did I tell you," I tell her, "I'm taking Hebrew classes?"

I can't tell if she is frowning. I peer at her closely. Again I find in her face that crumpled paper, that pungent caved-in peach, but after a few minutes I think I glimpse something that looks like me. I can't get her back as she was, but for a moment

*It's a rare moment of synchronicity,
yet suddenly I want it to be done. I
want to move on.*

I can see myself as I am. I look too intently, maybe, because my grandmother starts to make small puling sounds, nearly weeping. "Look," I say. "Look. I brought something."

In my bag are the sloppy Xeroxes from Hebrew class. I show her the letters and I say to her the sounds, which really aren't so different from the sounds she's making now, the sounds of weird half-weeping. For a brief moment we are speaking nonsense in sync. In my head, it is like yesterday's class. We are almost chanting.

It's a rare moment of synchronicity, yet suddenly I want it to be done. I want to move on from the Xeroxed packet. I want to read to her not just letters, not just simple words, but sentences, complex one. I want to tell her stories. But I haven't been learning long enough. For a time I must forget that desire for complexity. I must move backwards and start at the beginning. I stop reading off the packet.

My grandmother, too, falls silent. Still, I can tell she intends to say something—to herself, to her dead sister, maybe to me, maybe to someone else. I can tell just by the set of her jaw, she is preparing to speak. It will be some time before she has garnered the courage. Both of us sit here among strange alphabets that make us feel like small children. And like small children, we must remember to be patient with ourselves and one another. Together we wait, listening to the tick of the round clock on the wall, to the sound of our aging bodies, to our breathing language. ■

Lee Conell is currently an MFA candidate in fiction at Vanderbilt University. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in Glimmer Train, the New York Times, and other publications.

SHAME

It was just a little tourist jaunt:

We drove our cool cousin from America
to see the seashore, the beach, and then
the working girls along the coastal road
pale and alone silhouetted in the sunset
by the great Mediterranean shore.

"As it gets dark," I explained,
"they become bold,
take off their clothes
to beat the competition."

"Amazing," said our guest
and I in my tour-guide voice replied
"Just one of the many sites
in the holy land." He reached
for his camera to ensure
this memory would last,
and flashed a photo before
I could even consider
the negative implications.

Suddenly the car was surrounded.

"The film! The film!" Screamed
one girl in red bra and skirt.
Our tourist didn't get it, sat
aghast at the scenery
coming alive. Someone from behind
started lifting the fender—
I think he was a man
dressed as a woman—the car shook so badly—
and mace sprayed into the open window.

"Give her the whole fucking camera,"
someone screamed from inside the car
hands covering tearful eyes.

And the film flew out
into the sands.

It was a miracle we got home
albeit without a picture but with
our vision almost intact.

KAREN ALKALAY-GUT

LOS ANGELES WOMEN ARE CHANGING JEWISH LIFE RIGHT NOW

WHY L.A.? WHY WOMEN? AND WHY NOW?

by RABBI SHARON BROUS

“Everything loose rolls west,”

my mother observed when I moved to Los Angeles 22 years ago. People have always gravitated here to escape conformity, create provocative innovations in the arts and explore spiritual aspects of themselves. Increasingly, these explorations include Jewish identity.

Los Angeles Jews are borrowing the best from other cultures—a little like the hybrid Korean tacos so prevalent in our city’s food trucks—to create something new, relevant and delicious in the ways we worship and connect. Most of these new initiatives, often attracting elusive unaffiliated Jews, are led by women who are altering the way Jewish Angelenos eat, pray, love and live—and creating waves across the country.

In a city that boasts some of the largest “mega-shuls” in the country, people are craving more personal connection. Women rabbis and leaders are paying attention and creating communities offering intimacy and inclusion, all without sacrificing intellectual rigor.

There are proudly gay observant Jews, drum circles on the beach during *Tashlikh* at the new year and unprecedented collaborations between Jewish organizations of different denominations. And there’s Rabbi Sara Brandes, who leads the Minyan Kol Chai (an hour of yoga, *davening* and study) in the Los Angeles suburb

of West Hills, where yoga is “a wonderful tool to prepare for Jewish prayer.”

Here’s what else is in the mix. Rabbis Sharon Brous, Naomi Levy and Susan Goldberg are creating welcoming places of worship, reflection and social action for “disconnected” Jews. Rabbi Laura Geller, in the pulpit at Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills since 1994, paved the way for women to be taken seriously as leaders of major Jewish religious and spiritual entities in this town where tradition is suspect. Yiddishkayt, a new Yiddish cultural organization that draws inspiration from L.A.’s diversity, proudly identifies as “outside the confines of academic and religious institutions.” Los Angeles is home to the largest community of Jewish Iranians (or “Persians,” as they call themselves) in the world, many of whom moved here after Iran’s 1979 revolution. Writer Gina Nahai and comedian Debbie Jhoon are communicating the aspirations and frustrations of this immigrant community, helping it find its voice and its footing. Jill Soloway and Ayana Morse of East Side Jews are invigorating hipsters and young families via a mix of social connections and creative education programs. Women like these are challenging expectations and breaking boundaries all across this sprawling city, where in the past Jews often came to reinvent their identities.

“I wanted to make people comfortable enough that they could sit in that room—but uncomfortable enough that they would actually feel something.”

Rabbi Sharon Brous

Rabbi Sharon Brous has the special sauce that mainstream Judaism craves. She was named the #1 Rabbi on The Daily Beast/Newsweek list of America’s Top 50 Rabbis for 2013, with her organization Ikar (Hebrew for “essence”), which The Daily Beast describes as a “come-as-you-are spiritual community,” and “a magnet for L.A.’s young, unaffiliated Jews... The Ikar model: equal parts warmth, spirituality, intellectual rigor, and call to action.”

Brous founded Ikar in 2004, soon after she was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Her own religious and spiritual journey led her from a deep sense of alienation to eventually finding a meaningful way in. After seminary and a rabbinic fellowship at B’nai Jeshurun in Manhattan (a spiritually vital, social-justice-oriented congregation), she moved to Los Angeles so her husband could pursue his career as a comedy writer. “I found that the most interesting young Jews I met in L.A. were hungry for com-

munity, spiritual depth, even ritual, but didn't connect with institutional Jewish life. I began to realize that what people were rejecting was not Judaism, but more established forms of Jewish religious life in America, such as the strict set of rules around conduct in services."

She was looking to move, challenge and inspire people, to reframe core aspects of Jewish life as spiritually rich and meaningful, and push people to consider what it means to be a human being in a world rife with violence, hunger, poverty and daily struggles. "I held a couple of Shabbat services in my living room—but everyone who came was already an insider," Brous explained. "Then I met Melissa Balaban, one of the deans of the law school at USC, with her husband and a few friends who had given up on finding a synagogue they could connect with in L.A. We talked for hours. Our visions of what was possible in the Jewish world aligned deeply. We were, as we said that night, *cautiously ecstatic*, as if we were on the cusp of building something that mattered. Melissa said I should go home and write down my vision—we were going to make it happen."

"The thing that really spoke to us is the idea that Judaism shouldn't be compartmentalized," continued Balaban. "Your Jewish life, spiritual life, political life, should all be integrated. How can you be a Jew engaged in religious life and not have that change who you are in the world? How can you be a Jew working for justice and not understand that Torah animates that work?"

Brous was concerned that at the turn of the millennium, religion was defined by extremism and insularity on the one hand and alienation and disconnection on the other. She dreamed of creating a space for a return to prophetic Judaism, infused with spirit and activism. Her formula turned out to be inspirational. "We (Brous, Balaban and an initial core group) sent our vision statement to a few friends each, saying 'If the idea of reclaiming your Jewish life resonates, come this Friday night. Let's see what we can build'. It went viral. It was right before Pesach, and about 135 people showed up. What was amazing is that there were multiple points of connection in that room, from law school to camp, to growing up in Philly. We realized these people wanted

MAYIM BIALIK: EXPOSING HERSELF WHILE DRESSING MODESTLY

Actor Mayim Bialik, currently starring in television's #1 sitcom, "The Big Bang Theory" (and former child star of "Blossom"), is having an influence on Jewish life beyond L.A. She blogs for the Jewish parenting site Kveller, where she reveals her gravitational pull towards Modern Orthodoxy, and how that influences her life choices, including what to wear on the red carpet.

Less challenging (in the modesty department) is her wardrobe for her Big Bang character, Amy Farrah Fowler, nerdy scientist and quasi-girlfriend of one of the show's leads, Sheldon. "I take the least time in Hair and Makeup," she states proudly. "Producers wanted me to be androgynous. My character's clothes are two sizes larger than I normally wear. I don't need to wear Spanx to work or a proper bra. It's nice to play a character who is not valued for being attractive. It's fascinating that we [Amy and Sheldon] have a relationship that's never been physically consummated."

When Kveller launched in 2010, Bialik was approached to pitch a column along the lines of "What Would Blossom Do?" Bialik thought it would be interesting for people to see a child star having other points of view, so she has shared her take on natural childbirth (pro) to toilet training (con) and maneuvering co-parenting after a divorce. Isn't she afraid of exposing herself? "As a feminist, I don't want to be constrained, even if I am a public person," Bialik declares, noting that to be whole, you have to learn to live with tension. "When we're scared, we run; when we embrace it, we get to be more fully integrated human beings."

To say Bialik has made unconventional choices for a Hollywood actress would be an understatement. She has a doctorate in neuroscience and taught for five years in the Los Angeles home school community. She currently homeschools her two children in science, although for now, acting is her fulltime job.

"I haven't made any of my choices lightly," Bialik says of her Orthodox practice. "I like structure. I like ritual. I have respect for the notion of tradition, but know there's always room in Judaism for dialogue."

As a Modern Orthodox feminist, every day she's faced with decisions about how to observe, how to dress, how to navigate the tension which, she said, "makes good art. I never say I won't wear a miniskirt in a role. I have nice legs, you know!"

to be around each other, and it was creative engagement with Judaism that was bringing them together."

Brous sought to "make people comfortable enough that they could sit in that room—but uncomfortable enough that they would actually feel something." With Ikar, she started addressing moral conundrums, including taking an open-eyed look at Israel and engaging in uncomfortable dialogue around issues like immigration and gun violence.

She has worked hard to reintroduce emotion into the prayer service, including the element of surprise. No two services are ever the same. "We're different people every week—why should the service always stay the same?" She is not afraid to go off-script, "to express struggles, challenges and ambivalences without questioning peoples' loyalty and their love."

Brous explains that the davening experience at Ikar is designed to be powerful,

personal and moving, even for cynics and atheists. The dynamic mix of *frum* Jews with the seriously marginalized creates a special energy. The common language is music—a blend of Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Mizrahi, old and new, U2 and Debbie Friedman.

Paradoxically, while striving to make people "spiritually uncomfortable," Brous and the team take special pains to make people feel welcome, with a cadre of "trained schmoozers" who stand outside every service greeting people.

Ikar is known for intense Shabbat davening as well as creative weekly house parties in homes and bars. The house parties started when Brous realized early on that people were more than willing to engage in Torah study and deep conversation about life's great struggles and blessings, as long as they didn't have to first overcome barriers to participation (institutional or their own assumptions).

When joining Ikar, people take on social justice commitments, from working to end hunger, to advocating for immigration reform, environmental justice, or participation with Ikar's partner community in Uganda, where they are funding the use of Israeli technology in a village school.

Of Rabbi Brous' leadership style, Melissa Balaban observed, "She once said to a rabbinic intern, 'If people walk out of services talking about how smart the rabbi is, you've failed. They should leave saying, 'I never knew Torah could be so relevant in my life'. Then you succeeded.'" Balaban added, "I don't think that's a typically male approach." She continued, "There is something about how women lead organizations, with our hearts and brains at the same time."

Said Rabbi Brous, "We are constantly striving to engage a culture shift to a *tzedakah* model rather than a 'pay to pray' gym membership model." Her own rabbinic interns are now fanning out across

the country, bringing her "special sauce" of activism and challenge with them.

"I believe we should lower the bar for coming in the door and raise the bar of what we're offering."

RABBI SUSAN GOLDBERG

After working for 10 years as a dancer and community organizer, Susan Goldberg began studying with the late Rabbi Carole Meyers, the first female rabbi of a Los Angeles synagogue, Temple Sinai of Glendale.

Goldberg was raised as one of the only Jewish kids in her Echo Park neighborhood, and still lives on the East Side, in Eagle Rock. While in rabbinical school at the Academy for Jewish Religion,

California, a transdenominational chaplaincy program in Los Angeles, she was invited to stop by her local synagogue, Temple Beth Israel of Highland Park. TBI had dwindled to a handful of mostly elderly folks who continued showing up on Shabbat morning even after the temple's last rabbi died in the mid-1970s. A couple of members in their 30s and 40s were trying to revive the congregation, and reached out to Goldberg to attend. "Then they found out I was a rabbinical student," she said, "so I started leading a once-a-month family service. That was the engine for growth. It was like being in a small town. I'd be in the park or meeting people and tell them about synagogue. People started coming, one family at a time. We added an adult learning program. Another person started a school with 10 kids. After a couple of years I became education director. Last year we had 75 kids in school and a couple hundred families.

Top row, left to right: Mayim Bialik, Esther Kustanowitz; Rabbi Susan Goldberg, Rabbi Naomi Levy, Rabbi Denise Eger. Bottom row: Liz Safirstein Leshin, Esther Kustanowitz, Racele Rosett, Jill Soloway; Jill Soloway; Melissa Balaban, Marcia Cohn Spiegel (seated), Rabbi Sharon Brous.



A lot of people never thought they'd be members of a synagogue."

The majority of members are inter-faith families, including several gay and lesbian families. "A lot of what happens with interfaith couples is that the non-Jewish partner is leading the journey (towards integrating Judaism into their homes), but they feel alienated. My feeling is, let's be inviting, not exclusive."

"It's not about having no boundaries," Goldberg noted. "I encourage people to be clear about what traditions in the house are Jewish, not to look for something diluted. I believe we should lower the bar for coming in the door and raise the bar of what we're offering, so that it's deep and rich, layered and complex."

Goldberg approaches learning with a psycho-spiritual focus, pairing text study with concepts that apply to daily life. Take, for example, a Talmudic discussion of lost and found objects, focusing on *yeshb*, a state of despair when someone gives up hope of recovering something they have lost. She might start a learning session by looking directly at the text and then translating from Hebrew and Aramaic so people can have the experience of text study. Then

she'll ask how this concept applies to other things in our lives that we feel we have lost: connections, relationships, places inside ourselves that we want to recover, taking a generative concept from one setting and exploring it in ways that are emotionally and spiritually relevant today.

After seeing her astonishing success at TBI, the huge Wilshire Boulevard Temple—built by L.A. movie moguls in the 1920s—has recruited Rabbi Goldberg to work some of her magic under its massive, newly-renovated dome.

"The end point of prayer is not 'I feel better about myself', but 'I'm now charged to act'."

Rabbi Naomi Levy

Also on this year's Daily Beast Top Rabbis list, Rabbi Naomi Levy was in the first class to ordain women at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary. She served seven years as rabbi of Mishkon

Tephilo, a traditional Conservative synagogue in Venice, California. "I loved being a congregational rabbi. But it never failed that on Shabbat, being near the beach, people would stroll in and have a look around. I knew they were Jews, but could almost count how long they would stay—seconds," said Levy. "Our services there were created and led by Jewish insiders, which is wonderful, and at the same time, I found myself drawn to the Jewish outsiders. It's interesting, since I grew up in Boro Park, attended the Yeshiva of Flatbush, and went to Orthodox summer camp. I didn't know a single non-Jew; I didn't even know there was a Halloween. I was really living in an alternate environment." And yet, Levy had known that she wanted to be a rabbi since she was four. Perhaps she is drawn to outsiders because "I wasn't exactly in the environment that would welcome my dreams," she noted, adding that she was lucky to have come of age just at the time when women were permitted to become Conservative rabbis. "For me to have been at that moment in history at that time in my life, it was like coming home."

After leaving Mishkon, Levy wrote two books (*To Begin Again* and *Talking to God*). "I was on the road doing a lot of book tours and lecturing. Over and over, I would meet [Jewish] people who would tell me they had walked away or were raised with nothing," she observed. "Somehow the threshold of the synagogue was intimidating, but the bookstore was a nice entry point to talk to a rabbi about what they might be going through."

Back in Los Angeles, Levy found herself meeting Jews who were unaffiliated. "I started asking what moved them, what they struggled with. I naively had made the assumption that unaffiliated Jews were atheists, that they didn't have a need for Jewish spiritual connection, but what I was finding more and more was that I was meeting Jews who were spiritual, who were theists, who were saying they had tried but could not find God in synagogue, that the synagogue experience had left them cold and that they were turning elsewhere for spirituality in places like Buddhism or yoga. But they weren't abandoning their Jewish identity."

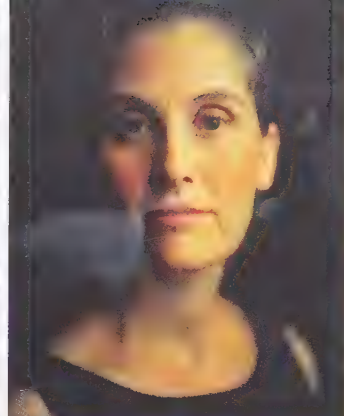
Rabbi Levy conceptualized *Nashuva* nine years ago with a group of friends

SUZANNE TRACHT & RACELLE ROSETT: THE ULTIMATE SEDER—FOOD AND STORYTELLING TO UNDERSTAND WHO WE ARE

Chef Suzanne Tracht, a Fine Dining Hall of Fame inductee, grew up in Phoenix, where her family kept kosher and held their seder around the (well-dressed) family ping pong table.

"I've always wanted to create a restaurant where there's a sense of community and neighborhood," says Tracht, something she has achieved with a loyal following at her high-end L.A. steakhouse, Jar. A tight-knit group of people enthusiastically return for the seder she has held every year since the restaurant opened 12 years ago. Tracht serves Pesach comfort food with a twist, matzo ball soup with lemongrass—simultaneously just like and unlike what Bubbe used to make. Contrella Patrick Henry, a gospel soloist, often comes and sings *Go Down Moses*. And award-winning television writer Racelle Rosett, of "thirtysomething" and "Blossom," leads the service. (She's familiar to *Lilith* readers as the winner of last year's fiction contest.) "I love Passover," Rosett said, "because what is the seder but a giant important story?"

Tracht offers her faithful seder-goers something else each year, the chance to donate to Mazon (the organization whose mission is "A Jewish Response to Hunger"). "It's a really nice thing to do for the customers who support us all year long." That's right. It's nice to give her customers a chance to do *tikkun olam*. But not surprising from a restaurateur who donates her time to innumerable charitable events, including a longtime partnership with SOVA (a Hebrew word meaning "eat and be satisfied"), a community food and resources program of Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles. In 2009 Tracht donated to SOVA her \$10,000 prize from successfully placing on Bravo's show "Top Chef Masters."



Top row, left to right: Melissa Balaban, Marcia Cohn Spiegel; Jill Soloway, Rabbi Susan Goldberg, Ayana Morse; Rabbi Susan Goldberg. Bottom row, left to right: Suzanne Tracht, Rabbi Sara Brandes; Rabbi Naomi Levy; Rabbi Susan Goldberg, Racelle Rosett, Jill Soloway.

around her dining room table. “The goal was to create an entity that lived, taught, breathed a Jewish spirituality and connected that to acts of justice. That linked that need for prayer with action, that saw the end point of prayer not being ‘I feel better about myself’, but ‘I’m now charged to act,’” she explained.

Music was deeply important. (Nashuva has possibly the nation’s largest Jewish drum circle and an eight-member band.) “The goal was to find a musicality that was accessible and participatory, that could take you on a journey to ecstatic places and to solemn places. Melodies have a power all their own, a nonverbal, pre-verbal power, to unite and comfort, inspire, lift and calm us. As a new mother sings to an infant, no words are necessary. When the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, their first reaction, biblically speaking, was to sing a song.

“It’s not only about being earnest,” she added. “Lightheartedness, joy and fun are important in what we’ve created.”

Also key has been conducting services in different types of venues. “Taking Nashuva outdoors offers a whole power unto itself. So many of the Psalms are

about seeing God’s hand in nature—sky, roots, roaring seas—that to be able to experience Judaism outdoors takes things to other levels.”

Then there’s the live webcast. High Holiday services, Tashlikh on the beach with drums, and Yom Kippur in particular, have upwards of 75,000 people participating live through that. “I can’t tell you how many wonderful notes we’ve gotten from people all over the world,” reported Levy, “people who are homebound, who felt they were done with Judaism, who are in hospice, entire college dorms. That’s been a really remarkable experience.”

And Levy has accomplished all of this without a traditional membership model. “If you come, you’re a member,” she says. Monthly Friday night services attract 400 people, and High Holidays can draw in over 1,000.

Levy speculates that Nashuva has also been a safe place for interfaith families.

Why does reaching the outsiders resonate so much for Levy? “Judaism is full of humor, it’s full of irony. It’s full of tension. Before abandoning it or making assumptions about it, I want people to experience

it, the wealth of it, and have it kind of marinate. There are so many interesting, exciting, fascinating Jews who are at the brink of being lost to Jewish life, and I don’t want to give up on them.

“The word *nashuva* means ‘we will return’. It comes from the last line of Lamentations that says ‘Turn us to You, God, and we will return’. I love the reciprocity of it, the implied connection, that we all have that possibility of returning. We all have that power.”

“Women have a different energy than men, whether it’s an ability to see things differently or try things without the fear of convention.”

Ayana Morse

Changing neighborhoods are often gentrified by artists who pave the way for others, and Jewish life in Los Angeles is being invigorated by artists and creative

thinkers moving back to the Holy Land of the East Side, towards Boyle Heights, the area of the city where Eastern European Jews first settled in large numbers during the first years of the twentieth century. Although Los Angeles has the second largest Jewish population in the country, most of the Jews moved from the East Side to the suburbs in the 1940s and 50s, leaving very little organized Jewish life on the East Side until now.

The modern East Side is funkier and more affordable than the staid West Side, and these young Jews are bringing a vibrancy and vitality to Jewish life in their neighborhoods and beyond. (To give you an idea of what these neighborhoods look like, do a Netflix download of *The Music Box*, Laurel and Hardy's Oscar-winning 1932 short, shot in Echo Park).

In 2010, just after she began at the Silverlake Independent JCC (SIJCC), Co-Executive Director Ayana Morse co-founded East Side Jews with Jill Soloway and a group of about 10 other friends who were alumni of Reboot, a national organization that brings together, by invitation, Jews from various walks of life.

A partnership with SIJCC “emerged immediately because of my position there,” said Morse, adding, “We can offer a public gathering space, like in the 1950s when the JCCs first boomed.”

Morse described coming from Boston to Los Angeles in 2005 with her husband, Josh Feldman (interim director of the Jewish cultural organization Six Points Fellowship) as “crazy artists.” She believes the arts play an important role in Jewish life, “as a spiritual practice.” The SIJCC is just getting ready to launch an arts and culture program called ‘Culture Lab’—Morse calls it “the love child between the Silverlake JCC and East Side Jews,” bringing together artists to work collaboratively. “A huge part of what we are interested in is local, making Los Angeles a small town.”

In Hollywood, Morse's East Side Jews co-creator, writer-director Jill Soloway, is a heavy hitter. A three-time Emmy nominee for her work writing and producing television's *Six Feet Under*, as well as being the showrunner for HBO's “How to Make it in America” and Showtime's “United States of Tara,” Soloway won the 2013 U.S. Dramatic Directing Award at

Sundance Film Festival for her recently released first feature, “Afternoon Delight.”

“In 2005 I went to the Reboot summit,” said Soloway. “I loved the energy and collaborative atmosphere and wanted to find a way to create that in my own community around Silverlake.”

East Side Jews caught on fast. Why the popularity? “Sometimes being Jewish is approached as a duty,” Soloway explains. “With their emphasis on membership and dues, sometimes synagogues play into this idea. East Side Jews lowers the barrier for entry—both Jews and non-Jews are welcome, and there's always an anything-can-happen spirit. With East Side Jews, we try to find the right balance between the spiritual and the secular and rediscover Jewish traditions in an irreverent but serious way. My best guess is that we're filling a hole that we never even realized was there.”

Soloway's background in theater and out-of-the-box thinking enables her to dream up events that are described by screenwriter Micah Fitzerman-Blue in *The Jewish Journal*, L.A.'s Jewish weekly, as “freaky, experimental, post-denominational, re-exploration of ritual form.” A 2011 article by Danielle Berrin explains: “They (East Side Jews) held a *Havdalah* event called *Sacred/Profane* at Spice Station Silverlake, where they dunked homemade French fries in turmeric and curry, drank beer and listened to the Jewish adult-film actress Nina Hartley lecture on ‘Sacred Sensuality’ (even though, technically, that was the profane part). Another time, they celebrated *Rosh Hodesh* on the rooftop of the Wi Spa, calling it ‘Once in a Jew Moon,’ during which men and women made their way through an Asian-style *mikveh* and, afterward, gathered under the open sky for Torah study with Rabbi Sharon Brous.”

Last July, East Side Jews hosted LoveFest, a singles event on the holiday of *Tu b'Av*, traditionally “a day of joy that served as a matchmaking event for unmarried Jews,” explained Soloway. “We wanted to attract people who would never go to a singles event at a temple.”

Soloway's award-winning new film has a Jewish female lead, and she set the story at the Silverlake JCC. “There's a scene at the end of ‘Afternoon Delight’ where the main character, Rachel, and her husband

sort of rediscover their love and connection while lighting Sabbath candles. I'm pretty sure that before Reboot, I would never have thought to use the characters' rediscovery of their connection to Judaism as a platform for rediscovering their connection to each other. But,” she observed, “it felt very natural and right in this context.”

“In Los Angeles, there isn't the polarity of judgment I felt in New York. People don't ask ‘Where do you daven?’ but ‘Are you looking for a community?’”

Esther Kustanowitz

In 2011, social media maven Esther Kustanowitz was named in *The Big Jewcy's* annual 100 Jews to Watch, with this description: Jewish Engagement Superstar.

Kustanowitz (@EstherK on Twitter), works part time as program coordinator for the NextGen Engagement Initiative at the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, helping Jewish youth-oriented programs in Los Angeles network with each other, from more traditional organizations to innovative startups. She also blogs at myurbankvetch.com, and is currently writing a book about grief as a personal and communal experience, tentatively titled “Nothing Helps (But This Might Help): A Guide to Loss and What Comes After.”

The internet serves as a portal to connection at all points in a person's life, especially during times of difficulty and grief. After the death of her mother, Kustanowitz says, “people reached out to me—especially other women my age who had lost their mothers and who offered support and assistance. I cannot overstate the value of the tools that kept me connected and comforted, any time of day and in any city.”

Kustanowitz ranks high on Jewish Twitter user lists. “I started blogging in 2004, right as the Jewish world was beginning to discover this tool, and then was an early adopter of Facebook, then Twitter. I started really listening to how people talk to each other.” She sees a real sense of fear on the part of Jewish

MARCIA (MARTY) COHN SPIEGEL: A TRAILBLAZER FOR L.A. WOMEN

Spiegel made her mark as one of the first to write about abuse and alcoholism in the Jewish community, when the prevailing approach to those topics was denial and silence. After going back to school 35 years ago for a social work degree at 50, Spiegel taught at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, and, working for the National Council of Jewish Women, she led some of the germinal Jewish feminist workshops in the 1980s. Later, she was a participant in a conference focusing on spirituality, and still later, she was one of the organizers of a conference about women and power in Jewish organizations.

Her work goes on. She's part of a small national group—B'not Esh—daughters of fire, meeting for 32 years, and setting the agenda for the larger Jewish community. Its youngest member is now 28. "These are rabbis, Ph.D. historians, psychologists and social workers, so the work we did began to find its way into normative synagogues and prayer books," says Spiegel.

Her own work with those going through trauma and grief convinced Spiegel to have a *Simchat Chochmah* (ceremony of wisdom) when she turned 60. For this, her friend the late songwriter Debbie Friedman wrote her now-well-known *Mi Shebeirach*, as a prayer for Spiegel to heal from her own suffering and losses.

In 2000, Spiegel and Rabbi Laura Geller were invited to speak at Spiegel's congregation, Ner Tamid in Palos Verdes, California, on "The Future of Jewish Women." Spiegel said, "Before I can talk about where we're going, I have to talk about where we've been. Just 15 years ago, when I joined this congregation, I was asked to remove my *tallit*. A man said my wearing it was as disrespectful as if I had come into the synagogue naked. It was that offensive."

The remarkable leadership and creativity among Jewish women in Los Angeles today thrills her, and she attributes it, in part, to the success she and her early counterparts had in beginning to shatter the glass ceiling for female Jewish professionals in L.A. and elsewhere.

And yet, when asked why she thinks so many of the new Jewish entities in Los Angeles are being led by women, she noted that, "While I was in graduate school, we examined the feminization of certain professions. At the time there were two women rabbis in L.A. and no major Jewish organization was headed by a woman. We discussed that as the number of women increased in a profession, the less attractive it became to men.

On the bright side, Spiegel observed, as new generations come up, they have seen women in power and are not frightened by it.

nonprofits as they try to negotiate how to use social media. "It's scary, because they don't understand it, or think it's too expensive. I explain they are tools for organization and community building."

Kustanowitz grew up "Orthodox-ish" in New York, and says her day school education informs her perspectives. "I had a rich background, biblically and Hebraically. Israel is important to me." However, her background didn't offer a lot of encouragement to young women "to engage with the text from a personal perspective, which necessarily would have meant examining women's narratives within the biblical or Talmudic texts. If a woman was present in a text, it was as a wife and mother or fertility-challenged, waiting for a miracle baby. Were those the

only role models I had to look to? Where were women's voices?"

Now she considers herself "post-denominational" and attends Orthodox and Conservative *shuls* and independent minyanim. Even with her Jewishly rich background, she says, as a woman she felt "utterly unprepared to attend services that offered a bit more in terms of egalitarianism. It's still something that I struggle with."

Perhaps that personal struggle is one reason Kustanowitz has been such an active participant in many Jewish initiatives around the world. "Jews in their 20s and 30s are bootstrapping their own Jewish identities," she says.

"It's a rich time now for the start-up mentality in the Jewish world," notes Kustanowitz, adding that "the starting up is easy." But sustainability, including "next stage funding" is more difficult. Young people want to hold on to their independence, but want the stability (and cash) that more established institutions (the Federation, synagogues) can provide. Traditional institutions want to bring in youth, with their fresh ideas, but tend to hold off on partnering until they see young people putting their money where their *niggun*-singing mouths are. Negotiations are moving forward.

The future is now.

Women have always been Jewish communal leaders, putting their values of social justice into action largely as volunteers. It makes sense that they would carry this into their roles as rabbis and paid executives. And women's historical outsider perspective enables them to bring a fresh approach to Jewish ritual, such as incorporating the arts as a way in to spirituality for their congregations.

What was once considered *outré* is becoming increasingly mainstream. Rabbi Denise Eger, an out lesbian who, in 1992, founded Congregation Kol Ami, a synagogue serving gay Jews and their allies, is the new president-elect for the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Finally, the reason women are rising up in leadership roles in Los Angeles—and elsewhere around the country—is that the road to this moment was paved by feminist leaders of earlier generations who struggled mightily for a woman's right to be accepted to rabbinical school, to lead major institutions, to be seen as an equal partner in rituals and relationships. Leading on their own terms, Jewish women have finally reached the top in Los Angeles, and they have arrived on their own terms, not in a Rolls Royce, but in a Prius.

Liz Safirstein Lesbin is a journalist, filmmaker, and was once a Lilith intern. She is a longtime development director for Los Angeles-area nonprofits.

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A Conversation with Erica Jong

At 40, Fear of Flying

by ARYANNA GARBER

The “zipless fuck”—no strings attached, no power games, just pure pleasure between two strangers. Erica Jong coined this term in *Fear of Flying*, her groundbreaking 1973 novel chronicling young Isadora Wing’s search for sexual gratification, freedom and herself. Although the book initially received scathing reviews from scandalized critics, it has sold 20 million copies, and is now renowned as a feminist classic.

As the 40th anniversary of *Fear of Flying* approaches, the evolution of Isadora Wing’s reputation—from slut to savior to classic heroine—begs a critical evaluation of feminist and literary thought over the last four decades.

Fear of Flying came out at the height of second wave feminism. In the years leading up to its publication, Helen Gurley Brown published *Sex and the Single Girl*, Gloria Steinem and others founded Ms. Magazine, and a group of protestors threw away their bras and high heels to rally against the blatant sexism of the Miss America Pageant.

While Isadora may have been in good company among her feminist contemporaries, not everyone was willing to cheer her sense of freedom. Except for notable writers like Henry Miller and John Updike, many early reviews of the book crucify Isadora as whiny, self-indulgent, and pathologically obsessed with sex. “This crappy novel, misusing vulgarity to the point where it becomes purely foolish, picturing woman as a hapless organ animated by the simplest ridicule, and devaluing imagination in every line...represents everything that is to be loathed in American fiction today.” To sum up Paul Theroux’s review of *Fear of Flying* in his own words: it was “a mammoth pudenda.”

These indictments did not reflect the literary caliber of the novel, but rather men’s fear that a woman writer could usurp control over sexuality. So the reviewers argued that this book was simply about sex, and sex could be thrown aside as tawdry sensationalism. Early reviews needed this hook to keep Isadora from communicating her true message. It’s easier to parse out what Isadora’s body does than what her mind thinks. As Terry Stokes wrote in a 1973 review for *The New York Times*, “Isadora is as passive in the end as she was in the beginning. Oddly, the narration denigrates all women by casting them in her mold; people who don’t know what they want.” Sex for women was ostensibly just sex. And if sex was sex was sex was sex, then Isadora Wing was a harlot, Erica Jong was a provocateur, and *Fear of Flying* was nothing more than a “crappy novel.”

Neatly categorized as smut, the screaming, liberating voices of this narrative could be silenced. Women had to be passive and confused because these men were afraid to give up their domination over sex—writing about it, talking about it, enjoying it—that was their power. Deeper than this superficial fear was the idea that a woman could be using sex as a metaphor, as an exploration of female identity. The novelty of such a connection, between

body and soul, especially in a female character, was unfamiliar and terrifying to early critics.

Henry Miller and John Updike were able to understand these complexities from the beginning. Miller wrote “I feel like predicting that this book will make literary history, that because of it women are going to find their own voice and give us great sagas of sex, life, joy and adventure.” Updike proclaimed in a New



Yorker article, “*Fear of Flying* not only stands as a notably luxuriant and glowing bloom in the sometimes thistly garden of ‘raised’ feminine consciousness but belongs to, and hilariously extends, the tradition of *Catcher in the Rye* and *Portnoy’s Complaint*.”

Isadora was searching for something greater than the zipless fuck, she was searching for the zipless self. An identity that had been buried through years of men and family and analysis, and she was finally ready to pull the zipper down and discover who she might actually be—a much scarier journey than any of the early male reviewers could have anticipated.

Aryanna Garber: Many writers would have been disheartened by the harsh criticism your book received at first.

Erica Jong: I was very discouraged by how misunderstood I was. In 1973 and 1974, there were these lacerating reviews from people like Paul Theroux and Martin Amis, but there were also celebratory reviews from the New Yorker, Henry Miller and others who loved the book. It was all very confusing to me, because on the one hand I was being told I was writing crappy and vulgar porn and on the other hand that I had invented something new.

But things really changed for me when the letters started pouring in from readers saying, “You have changed my life,” and they

weren't all from women. The most common letter I received at that juncture, around 1975-76, was people writing "I'm looking at my life in a different way, you've written the story of my life."

So I began to have a little more confidence in the book at that point. The readers' enthusiasm started coming, and in addition to the letters, I would see copies of the book in which every other sentence was underlined and starred. I thought, well, I've unlocked something in these readers and they're very grateful.

AG: I've heard that with all the publicity that surrounded *Fear of Flying*, there were some anti-Semitic responses.

EJ: Our culture is more puritanical than we realize. So a book that people see as sexual raises all kinds of hackles. As a poet and a scholar, I never got hate mail. Poetry is not the language of our land—so even an erotic poem doesn't subject you to ridicule. But novels are a different story. And novels that become number one bestsellers have a much broader reach. When *Fear of Flying* was originally published, I got sacks and sacks of mail. Some of it was abusive. "Only commie kike bitches have such dirty minds!" is one I remember. The story of the Jewish women in America is one of the founding of settlement houses, participating in the civil rights movement, raising money for progressive causes. Jewish women have been extremely active in making America a more egalitarian country. And yet, if a Jewish woman is perceived as sexual, all hell breaks loose.

AG: What inspired you to write a character as courageous and outspoken as Isadora Wing?

EJ: At that time critics were used to seeing a novel in a certain way—the woman heroine mediated by the male eye. So they got

very excited in the 1970s that women were writing books, but they didn't really know what was *different* about women's books. I knew intuitively that I had to be inside the heroine, trying to bring her mind and body together.

Initially, I wrote *Fear of Flying* from a male point of view because those were the novels I read—Bellow, Roth, Mailer—they were the ones hailed as great. And I remember my first editor at Holt, Aaron Asher, asking me, "Why are you impersonating a male narrator? Why aren't you writing your novel in the voice of your poems? That is a new voice, that is the voice that needs to be heard." And that was the right comment at the right time. Bless him for that.

I was also inspired by the events that were happening in my own life. I had gone to a conference of psychoanalysts with Allan Jong, my then-husband, and I thought, this is the perfect framing device for the book. Here is a woman who has been in analysis all her life and she goes to a conference of psychoanalysts in which one of her analysts is speaking. From this experience I imagined a woman at this Congress of Dreams. And she is almost forced to plunge back into her mental life, her dream life. And that became the frame for a book about a woman searching for herself.

AG: Did you know from the beginning that Isadora was a "new" kind of woman?

EJ: When I was writing it I was really scared that it would never be published because it was so outspoken. Women were writing mad housewife novels. Men were writing about men and their problems, intellectual men and their sex lives, in which the women were very much externalized. But I was driven to write it, to write about a rounded woman who had all these parts to her and who wasn't afraid to see and understand the connection of these parts.

AG: What would you say were the strongest literary influences that compelled you to write *Fear of Flying*?

EJ: If there were two novels that most influenced *Fear of Flying*, they were *The Golden Notebook* and *Portnoy's Complaint*. *The Golden Notebook* because Doris Lessing acknowledges women are bodies and souls and she tries to unite them and *Portnoy's Complaint* because it's a very honest rant about how a man's sexuality influences the rest of his life. I wanted to tell the story of women's bodies and how they influence our lives. Our bodies do influence the way we think about the world. This is probably politically incorrect to say. *Portnoy* opened a door for both men and women.

AG: How do you think the attitudes toward Isadora have evolved since the 1970s?

EJ: I don't think writers always consciously know what they're doing. If you think about Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson, how could either of them know how their work would come to be seen? Whitman, we now say, was inventing a kind of free verse, but he didn't know that at the time. He didn't know that what he was doing was revolutionary. He had to review his own books in the Brooklyn Eagle because nobody wanted to review him. But he was driven to write, and he invented a new form of poetry.

I wanted Isadora to break the mold, to smash conventional genres, and in doing so she can speak to each generation that reads her. And I stress this because I think it's negative for writers to worry too much about genre. If you can liberate yourself from your particular decade's notion of genre, you may be able to create something new.

AG: What do you think Isadora can offer today's generation?

EJ: In a lot of ways we have gone backwards. With the emphasis on what has become known as the "hook up culture," and the fear of feminism—the word, if not the idea—we have surely regressed. Sex is more than just a physical manifestation. And that is really what Isadora was able to understand. In a puritanical society we're always going to fall back to seeing sex as just sex. But sex is *not* just sex. Our sexual being and our hormonal being not only inform our physical beings but also our spiritual beings.

Wholeness is hard to achieve. It's easier to fragment ourselves, and in the beginning Isadora was only able to express those fragments. But *Fear of Flying* is her journey to acceptance of body and soul. ■

Aryanna Garber is a writer and filmmaker. She is a graduate of Barnard College and has an M.S. in Narrative Medicine from Columbia University.



Rahel: A Golden Age Feminist Foremother

In *The Wayward Moon*, Janice Weizman tells the story of a Jewish woman living in ninth century Babylonia. In the book's opening pages, Rahel bat Yair, a 17-year-old, witnesses the brutal murder of her father, a respected physician, by a government official. Without thinking twice, Rahel plunges the knife into her father's murderer and has to flee her native Sura, a major center of Jewish learning both in Talmudic times and in the Geonic period in which this novel is set. Amusingly if implausibly, she disguises herself first as a man, then as a Muslim slave girl, and then as a Christian monk, and there is something picaresque and even quixotic about her episodic adventures.

Towards the end of the novel, after she has endured the pain of loss, the indignities of servitude, and the agony of rape, Rahel finds herself confronted by the choice of marrying either her lover, a barbarian named Lucan who hails from the northern islands beyond the reaches of the Islamic empire (presumably the British Isles of today), or a respectable Jewish widower in search of a mother for his children. Rahel's Jewish identity is already worn as thin as the bundle of clothes she carries with her, so perhaps it is not surprising that like many assimilated Jews today, she opts to follow her heart. She elopes with Lucan and the two set off on a caravan journey, until one morning she wakes up to "a sight of unspeakable horror. Lucan lay facedown in a pool of blood, a knife in his back."

Saved from the temptations of suicide by a Sufi master who directs her to a great rabbinic sage in the land of Israel, Rahel makes her way

to the Galilee, where she follows the road previously not taken and marries another Jewish widower, ultimately returning to the fold. Weizman's literary world, redolent with the scent of jasmine and saffron, offers us a fascinating window into a little-known period of Jewish history, and the reader willingly suspends disbelief to follow an increasingly self-assured and (pardon the anachronism) feminist Rahel as she comes into her own against the backdrop of the Golden Age of Islam.

ILANA KURSHAN is *Lilith's* books editor.

A Guy Romancing with Breathless Chutzpah

At the heart of Adelle Waldman's deliciously infuriating debut novel, *The Love Affairs of Nathaniel P.*, lies a deeply political, sexual question: What's a liberal, P.C. dude to do when his sexual proclivities conflict with his feminism?

If you're a single, straight woman living in New York, there's a good chance you've dated a guy like Nathaniel Piven: good-looking (but not intimidatingly so), sharp-witted, on the cusp of professional/creative success, with a standard of domestic hygiene that can best be described as "Bar Mitzvah Boy Gone Wild."

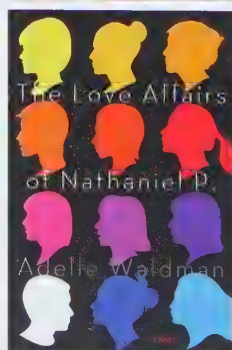
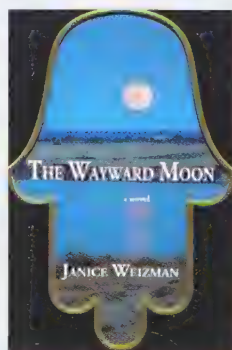
Nate swoops into and out of the lives of the women he romances with breathtaking chutzpah. The novel begins with an encounter with Juliet, a woman Nate briefly dated, accidentally impregnated, assisted in procuring an abortion—and then promptly forgot. Juliet begins remonstrating him ("You could have at least—" she says, exasperated), sending Nate and his "clam-

orous conscience" into a spiral of narcissistic over-analysis. "Could have at least *what*?" he wonders, as he proceeds to a dinner party at the home of Elisa (his ex-girlfriend), recounts various doomed love affairs, and woos the sensible, clever Hannah.

Nate is an astute (if somewhat priggish) observer of the Brooklyn literary set he aspires to conquer, and being immersed in his mind is, at first, a refreshing, guilty pleasure: Memoirists aren't real writers! Do-gooders are annoying! Reusable shopping bags are wussy! Emboldened by a generous advance on his first novel, Nate charms his peers, and the reader, with his brash, combative intellect.

But the red flags are there, strategically planted by Waldman to draw our attention to Nate's niggling hypocrisies. Women are unquestionably "capable of rational thought," the question is whether they're interested in it. In a "Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus" world, this position is almost forgivable. After all, Nate really, really likes women! (Especially the smart ones, like Hannah, who—gasp—have actually read as much as he has.) It's just that, well, they *do* get kinda crazy when you break up with them. Why, Nate quietly rages, do women get so caught up in their *feelings*?

The irony, of course, is that Nate refuses to acknowledge the extent to which he is caught up in his own feelings. He is adept at self-narration, but not self-awareness, and as a result he routinely hurts people. He says he wants a smart, feminist woman, which is not untrue, but what he really wants is a sexy, conventionally pretty one. The "easy but deep rapport" he has with Hannah, who is a total delight—wry, warm, and smart, without the pretentiousness endemic to their cohort—is no match for his chauvinist ego. In one of several moments of almost-clarity, Nate wonders if he might be "a bit misogynistic." Well, duh, Waldman seems to be saying from above, rapping his skull.



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The book stumbles where it succeeds: Nate's subtle, pervasive misogyny drives the drama and satire, but, as a result, Elisa and the cast of supporting female characters often feel shrewish and one-note. Hannah and Aurit (Nate's truth-talking, Israeli feminist friend), however, rise above it through the originality of their ideas and the beauty of Waldman's dialogue. (One suspects that the author, like Nate, simply *likes* them more.)

As reviewers who have fallen in love with a book are wont to note, these are minor quibbles. Ultimately, *The Love Affairs of Nathaniel P.* is a compelling, brilliant satire of modern love: think "Girls" meets *Pride and Prejudice* meets "Annie Hall." Protagonists don't have to be likable—just believable, and, occasionally, sympathetic. By that measure, Nate is a successful hero. You can't help rooting for him, hoping that someone—his therapist, his girlfriend, his mother—will shake him out of his aggressively rational state of mind into a more menschy state of being. **ELISSA GOLDSTEIN** is social media editor at *Tablet*. Follow her on twitter, @book_moth.

Women Moving in from the Comic Sidelines

"What does it mean to be a feminist today?" asks **Shannon O'Leary** in her introduction to *The Big Feminist But: Comics about Women, Men and the IFs, ANDs & BUTs of Feminism*. Edited by O'Leary and Joan Reilly, the book consists of almost three dozen black-and-white contributions: fiction and non-fiction, single-page cartoons and multiple-page stories. As O'Leary explains, comics have frequently been a marginalized medium, relegated to the realm of the lowbrow. And women have often been sidelined within this now increasingly respected art form, which makes the premise of the anthology both provocative and astute. Appropriately fashioned for conversations about what feminism entails, comics offer the potential for the expression of gaps, contradictions, and competing subjectivities. With their visually constructed and formally open-ended format, graphic narratives can help us reexamine what we take for granted, the ways we picture ourselves

in the world. This is also what makes the medium so attractive to those interested in examining other categorizations of identity—from the religious and ethnic to the political and regional—and why so many Jewish women in particular have appropriated the form in an attempt to make sense of contemporary Jewish identity.

As a crowd-funded project, this anthology presents an uneven assortment of narratives. The authors included address a variety of issues related to gender and identity, including motherhood, sexuality, sex work, pornography, relationships, and socio-economics. There is a limited amount of attention given to questions of race, ethnicity, and religion, as well as



"Some kids got Disney, I got the Holocaust."

How does one generation, and then another, convey a painful legacy to their children? It isn't easy. Four female authors of books for young readers do an outstanding job this season.

Lauren Yanofsky Hates the Holocaust by Canadian author **Leanne Lieberman** is narrated by a 14-year-old girl whose grandmother lost immediate family members to the Nazis and rarely talks about this, whose father is a Holocaust scholar, and whose mother won't give up trying to persuade her to join the local Jewish youth group. Lauren decides she's had enough (complaining that "Some kids got Disney, I got the Holocaust.") and makes up her mind that she's no longer going to be Jewish. It turns out this is easier said than done.

The poignant and arresting **Greenhorn**, by **Anna Olswanger**, with illustrations by **Miriam Nerlove**, is based on a true story. Set in Brooklyn in 1946, the sixth-grade boys studying at a residential Orthodox yeshiva are asked to welcome recently orphaned new classmates just arrived from Europe. One traumatized boy who is unable to let go of his past quickly is received with behaviors ranging from warm and sympathetic to puzzled and curious, to shockingly hostile and bullying.

In **Zebra Forest** by **Adina Rishe Gewirtz**, spunky courageous 11-year-old Annie was taught about lying—"As

with other things, if you are going to do it, do it well"—by her eccentric and loving but often depressed grandmother, who is raising her and her younger brother. (The lying helps keep the visiting social worker at bay.) This suspenseful novel—which has nothing explicitly Jewish in it—features another young protagonist trying to come to terms with an inheritance of violence and loss. In this case the arena for the violence and the struggle for survival is domestic and intrafamilial.

Finally, **Blue Thread** by **Ruth Tenzer Feldman** also depicts generational tensions, with a fantasy time-travel element connecting 16-year-old Miriam, the rebellious daughter of a Jewish family in Portland, Oregon, during the 1912 suffrage movement, with the biblical daughters of Zelophehad petitioning the tribal hierarchy to be able to be inheritors in their family which has no sons. Like the other books here, this one is about inheritance, albeit about a legacy more cheerful and less fearful.

NAOMI DANIS is *Lilith's* managing editor.

the aging female body. Some of the pieces offer pedantic storylines and underwhelming artwork. Nevertheless, the anthology is well worth a read-through, not only for its inspirational ambition, but also because of the valuable works interspersed throughout from some of the most important emerging and established cartoonists. The most powerful pieces are the stories that slantingly address or even mock (though lovingly) the question of what it means to identify—or disidentify—as feminist.

Gabrielle Bell's "Manifestation," for instance, is a seven-page meta-narrative (also published in *The Best American Comics*, 2011), in which Bell's autobiographical character is asked to contribute to an anthology on feminism by one Shannon O'Leary. This brilliant story follows Gabrielle as she attempts to adapt Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto*, and it concludes with an ancillary meditation on Bell's mother: "My mom was a housewife with four children, but I don't think she was very suited to the job. I think she'd have been happier as, say, a lovable eccentric tenured English professor with sabbaticals and summers off to read and travel."

Other notable contributions include the opening piece, "Pillow Talk," which is a collaboration between Vanessa Davis and her partner, Trevor Alixopulos. This

short and hilarious comic showcases a couple conversing in bed. But every four or five panels, the composer of the narrative switches, revealing the radically divergent ways a single conversation can be imagined by the parties involved. Another experimental and collaborative story, "Her Fat Feminist Ass," by Berlin cartoonists Ulli Lust and Kai Pfeiffer, similarly exposes the ways multiple perspectives can emerge out of intimate dialogues. Finally, Lauren Weinstein's breathtaking four-page comic, "If This Is All You Get," examines the contradictory but somehow coincident impulses that drive a mother and an artist (or is it an artist and a mother?).

The Big Feminist But is a long-awaited addition to the outpouring of anthologies that emerged out of women's comics collectives most forcefully in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. This work is, one hopes, one of the first of many to merge an experimental form with an urgent and complex set of questions about the intersections between identity, art and politics in the 21st century.

TAHNEER OKSMAN is assistant professor and

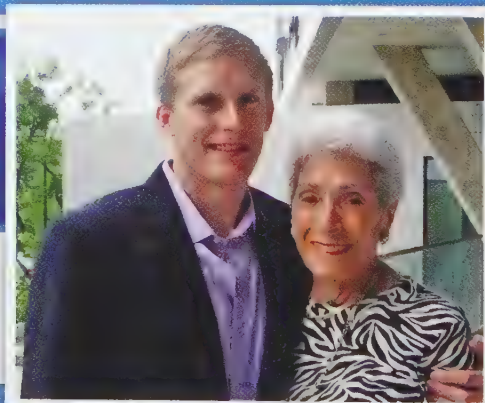
director of the writing program at Marymount Manhattan College. She is now at work on a manuscript about Jewish women's identity in contemporary graphic memoirs.

Jews and Tattoos

Jews have had a heinous association with tattoos: millions were marked, against their will, as they filed through the gates of concentration camps that dotted Europe like the spores of a horrific and malignant disease. Even after the survivors were liberated, the incised blue numbers remained, silent yet eloquent witnesses to the systematic process of dehumanization of which they were only a part.

Fast forward to **Margot Mifflin's** recently reissued *Bodies of Subversion: A Secret History of Women and Tattoos*, a brilliant and compulsively readable volume

that offers an alternative range of meanings: tattoo as a symbol of empowerment, of catharsis, or as a way of establishing new boundaries for the female body. And one of the featured subjects, Marina Vainshtein, will no doubt cause you to reexamine any ideas you might have had on the topic of Jews and tattoos.



Andrew, Bronfman Fellow 2005, age 25. Raised in Houston & attended UPENN. Today he is studying to be a doctor at The Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai in NY.

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WOMEN FIGHTING: Shani Boianjiu and Yael Dayan

Now that the Pentagon has lifted the ban on women serving in ground combat units in the U.S. military, American Jewish women have another reason to read **Shani Boianjiu's** *The People of Forever Are Not Afraid*, a novel about three young women who serve in the Israeli Defense Forces.

Some books are born great, some become great, and some have greatness thrust upon them. Boianjiu's novel belongs to the third category—a book whose hype was at its peak several months before it was published, when translation rights were sold to 22 countries and an excerpt was published in the New Yorker magazine. Though armed with advance praise from Nicole Krauss on one side of the ocean and Etgar Keret on the other, the novel received more lukewarm critical appraisal upon publication in October 2012 by Random House's new Hogarth imprint.

Boianjiu is a native Israeli from Kfar Vradim, a part of the country known as the “periphery” to distinguish it from the major cities, but she wrote the beginnings of this book as a final project for her creative writing degree at Harvard. From there it caught the attention of legendary literary agent Andrew Wylie, who sold the rights around the world. Somewhat surprisingly, it has yet to come out in Hebrew, where Boianjiu remains still very much on the literary periphery.

The circumstances of the book's publication are unusual: Most Israeli authors are published first in Israel and only those who meet with the highest levels of success domestically stand the chance of being published in the US, where a notoriously small proportion of translated titles are published annually. Moreover, Boianjiu elected to write in English, perhaps because the experiences she describes are all too familiar to Israelis over the age of 18, for whom military service is compulsory. The tedium and boredom of war that Boianjiu depicts—Avishag stands guard, Yael amuses herself by flirting with the younger men she trains to shoot, Lea watches Arabs pass by at checkpoint every morning—would seem surreal and compelling only to readers who have not themselves donned an IDF uniform. As Lea's mother tells her in the week before her draft, while the two of them shop for army supplies like an American mother and daughter raiding the mall for school supplies on Labor Day weekend, “It's going to be OK. Everyone does this. These will be the best years of your life.”

Boianjiu's novel is not without precedent, so long as one is prepared to jump back fifty years. In 1959, **Yael Dayan**, daughter of the famous military general Moshe Dayan, published *New Face in the Mirror*, an account of a young girl's military service, which she wrote during her free time on base. Her novel was published first in English and only then in her native Hebrew, a fact little known to most Israelis today, to whom she is famous as a politician and journalist. Though born on a kibbutz in Nahalal (also on the Israeli periphery), Dayan, like the cosmopolitan Boianjiu, was



Shani Boianjiu, Yael Dayan

living in Paris when her novel came out; she was 19. Her novel, too, is a heady cocktail of sex and war. While not crawling through mud or standing guard with her gun at night, Dayan's heroine, Ariel Ron, is exploring her ability to manipulate and dominate men; at one point during her military leave she seduces two brothers simultaneously, convinced that she can prevent them from finding out even when they all stay at the same seaside cottage.

Like *The People of Forever Are Not Afraid*, Yael Dayan's novel has much to say about fear. Ariel is strongly influenced by the image of her aloof and imperious father, the famous Area Commander who is clearly modeled on Moshe Dayan: “My father, I remembered, had no fears at all. In that he differed greatly from me. But he could not be called a courageous man because he had no fears to overcome. He knew nothing of the hesitations of fear; the quick trembling, the loud heartbeats, the paleness, the shaking hands, the sudden ache that freezes the body.” Boianjiu's heroine Yael is inspired by her mother, who served as an air traffic controller on a beach in Sinai during her own military service, even though such a role was highly atypical for a Yemenite woman recruit. Moreover, both Ariel and Yael find themselves in the same role, training soldiers just a year younger than themselves in how to shoot a rifle. At one point Boianjiu's Yael pulls her trainee, Boris, to the sand beside the shooting range, takes off her uniform, and seduces him next to their guns: “Boris' movements are lumbering and hesitant and young and unknowing. And he is not afraid.” In Dayan's novel, the trainee is an 18-year-old girl terrified of pulling the trigger, who inspires scorn and loathing in Ariel, until finally she admits, “I realized that I, too, was capable of fear; but not capable of admitting it, even to myself.”

We have Yael Dayan and Shani Boianjiu to thank for bringing the Israeli woman soldier's experiences to life for English readers. As for the gap between 1959 and today, well, there doesn't seem to be much of a gap to bridge. The new faces in the mirror are the same faces, and the people are forever afraid.

ILANA KURSHAN

Vainshtein, who these days goes by the name of Spike, was born in the Soviet Union and came to the United States when she was four. She was raised in California, and in the early 1990s, when she was eighteen, began having explicit Holocaust imagery tattooed on her skin. Now, more than twenty years later, she is covered. Mifflin lists these tattoos in some detail: a smoke-belching crematorium, naked bodies hanging from gallows, an old woman chained to a coffin of nails, an escaped inmate dying on a electrified fence, a can of Zyklon B (used in gas chambers), a skeleton in an open casket reading *kaddish*, a Star of David, and, in Hebrew, the words, "Earth hide not my blood" (from the book of Job) and "Never Forget." Using her body as both her sounding board and her canvas, Vainshtein has totally subverted both the imagery and the process: her tattoos are chosen and worn with pride, not shame, and they delineate aspects of her heritage in a graphic, unmistakable way—she is the granddaughter of survivors. When questioned about her unusual choice, Mifflin quotes Vainshtein as saying, "Why not have external scars to represent the internal scars?" Mifflin posits that even those born long after the Holocaust still suffer psychic damage—and pain.

But Vainshtein is not the only marked woman you'll meet here. There is Nora Hildebrandt, who was tattooed by her common law husband Martin in 1882, a decade before the first tattooing machine, and Irene Woodward, who died in 1915 and boasted a body covered in 400 tattoos. One woman got a tattoo after her divorce, saying she wanted, "to have a mark on my body that my husband has never seen." Another did it as a way to explain the "difference" she felt as a lesbian. Still another covered her mastectomy scars with tattooed images of flowers, fish, a heart and a series of eight phases of the moon.

Mifflin points out that now, for the first time in history, women who are tattooed outnumber men; according to a Harris poll, 23% of women wear tattoos as opposed to 19% of men. And women are becoming tattoo artists as well, venturing boldly into territory that

used to be an exclusively male domain. Mifflin believes that women tattoo artists perceive a different relationship between subject and image, and are more likely to urge the would-be tattoo wearer to choose an image that truly resonates with her.

Even those who have no desire for a tattoo of their own (and I include myself in this group) will be by turns astonished, fascinated, and moved by the depth and scope of this venerable tradition. And Jewish women in particular will have ample reason to consider the unique example set by Marina Vainshtein and re-evaluate what these words of ink mean to the people of the book.

YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH is *Lilith's* fiction editor. Her most recent novel is *Two of a Kind*.

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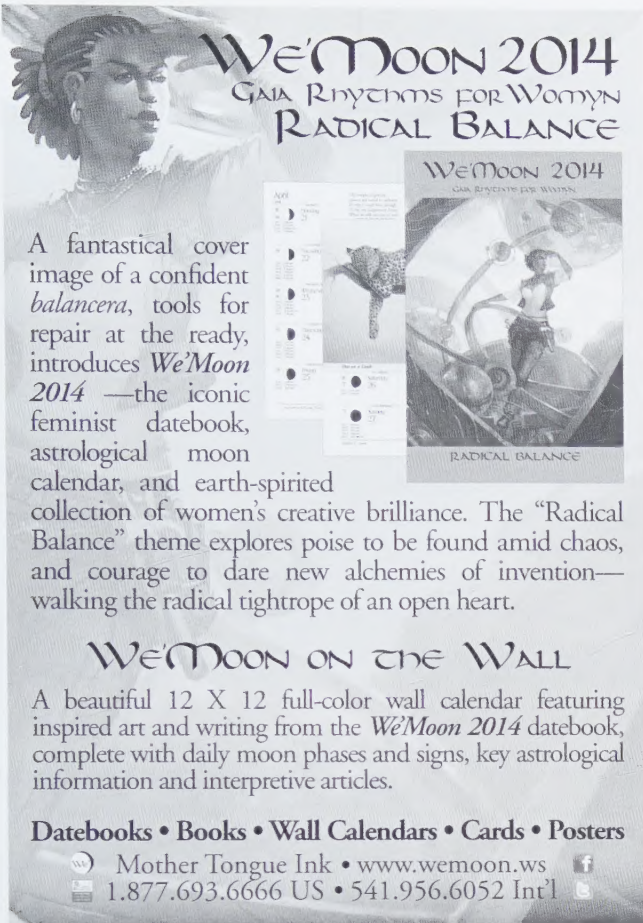
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Naomi Danis, Managing Editor, 8/21/2013



We'Moon 2014

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HAPPENING



Elisheva Biernoff,
"The Tools Are in Your
Hands," proposal drawing
2013. Courtesy of the
artist and Eli Ridgway
Gallery, San Francisco.

Building Utopia

What future would *you* like to inhabit? Elisheva Biernoff's interactive magnet painting "The Tools Are in Your Hands" allows visitors to construct their own utopian vistas. This happens in the exhibit *Work in Progress: Considering Utopia*, by three artists (also including Oded Hirsch and Ohad Meromi) in conjunction with the exhibit *To Build and Be Built: Kibbutz History*. At the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, through January 20, 2014 and June 2014 respectively. thecjm.org

Ya'el Tap Dance Company

It sounds like an unlikely pairing, but it works! Fusing Israeli folk dance with tap, choreographer Julie Rubin interprets Jewish prayers, blessings, traditions, and history in the dance company she founded in 2011. The Ya'el Dance Company (right) resident at The Wild Project in Manhattan, is available to travel. julie-rubin.com/yael-tap-company

Lobby!

Learn to be an effective advocate for issues you care about. The Women's Action Training Project in Los Angeles will help you via five workshops: Learn to Lobby, Social Media for Advocacy, Taking Charge of Media Relations, How to Write an OpEd, and Presenting Your Message. With an eclectic list of co-sponsors — National

Council of Jewish Women Los Angeles, The Jewish Women's Conference of Southern California, American Jewish World Service, Bend the Arc, Planned Parenthood, League of Women's Voters of Los Angeles Education Fund, the City of West Hollywood — the project is chaired by attorney and social justice advocate Sandra Fluke. To meet the goal of making advocacy skills accessible, workshops are open to all at a modest \$15. reshetwomen.org/events

Find Yourself a Mentor

The American Guild of Judaic Art has launched a free Judaic Visual Arts On-Line Mentoring Program for students in grades 7–12 anywhere in the world. To

participate in this unique opportunity: AGJA artists — over 100 professional artists celebrated for their Jewish related art — are volunteer mentors for these student artists, at no cost. The program also embraces special-needs students. Student application deadline November 1, 2013. jewishart.org

Special Needs Inclusion

Elana Naftalin-Kelman wants to change Jewish institutions — schools, synagogues, JCCs, camps, even museums — to make them more inclusive, thus uncovering people's strengths. Its name — Rosh Pina — comes from Psalm 118, "*even ma'asu habonim haita l'rosh pina*" — the stone the builders rejected became the cornerstone. In other words, the weakest, most vulnerable and most marginalized members of our community could become our cornerstone. Rosh Pina is a nonprofit that offers certification for Jewish institutions creating a more inclusive community for people with disabilities. Naftalin-Kelman is the Ruderman Fellow of the Joshua Venture Group. joshuaventuregroup.org/2012/fellows/fellows-current/elana-naftalin-kelman#sthash.RGuFSugg.dpuf



2: The Art of Marriage

"We couple continuously. Some for years and years and years and some for just a little while." *What 2 looks like* is the subject of this first online exhibition and a special 32-page booklet of art, poetry and prose about marriage and relationships from Jewish Currents, a non-profit, progressive Jewish media project whose mission is "to cultivate the self-awareness of Jews as builders of a better world, and to jazz up Jewish identity with art and creative expression." Jewishcurrents.org



THEY WERE IMMIGRANTS FROM RUSSIA. SHE WAS INFATUATED WITH AN INDIGENT, SOCIALISTIC PHYSICIAN, WHO SENT HER LONG INTENSE LETTERS. SHE WAS SWEEPED AWAY IN HIS PASSION FOR MUSIC, ART AND LITERATURE. HE GAVE HER NOVELS WITH CERTAIN PASSAGES NOTED IN PENCIL IN THE MARGINS. WHEN SHE MET UNCLE BENNIE SHE DID NOT LOVE HIM. BUT HE PROMISED THAT IF SHE MARRIED HIM HE WOULD CARE FOR HER AND HER AGED MOTHER FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES AND WHEN THE DOCTOR CONFRONTED HER, HE IMPLORED HER TO STAY WITH HIM. HE CRIED THAT HE MADE HER INTO AN ELEGANT FLOWER AND NOW THIS MAN WAS GOING TO PILLAGE THE FLOWER AND DESTROY HER. UNCLE BENNIE BRANDISHED A REVOLVER IN DOCTOR GOUDIS'S FACE AND SAID IF HE APPEARED AGAIN HE WOULD KILL HIM.



"The Farm Bill"

This new one-act play is about a woman's personal revolution in the halls of the United States Department of Agriculture. She finds herself in the fuzzy zone between personal comfort and civic responsibility and she "aims to make the politics of farming real and human for everyone," says playwright and social historian Susan Dworkin (above). Four characters, 35 minutes long, the play is meant to ignite discussion, debate and laughter. Consider staging a reading! susandworkin.com

Seeking Asylum in Israel

Israel has seen an influx of asylum seekers. There are currently 57,000 refugees there who have escaped from African countries, most of them from Eritrea and Sudan, including families who survived the genocide in Darfur. The Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel—ASSAF is the Hebrew acronym—was established in 2007 by a group of activists and academics in response to their plight. Israel does not have a clear policy regarding their status and rights, and there is no official authority specifically responsible for them. ASSAF's mission is to assist all those entering Israel in search of asylum. Programs are run by a small staff and more than 60 volunteers; some 5000 asylum seekers directly benefit each year. assaf.nfshost.com. Maya Paley in Los Angeles co-founded another organization advocating for a fair refugee-status determination process and proper treatment of African asylum-seekers in Israel. Right Now raises awareness by writing letters, making calls, and creating online petitions. asylumseekers.org

Love & Israel

For singles who think of living in Israel, there's a new matchmaking website to help them find each other. This *aliyah*-oriented dating site, founded by Nefesh b'Nefesh and Saw You at Sinai, is open to Jews of all levels of observance and to native Israelis too. seeyouinisrael.com

Children of Adults with Cancer

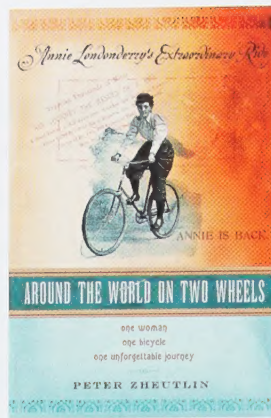
Bringing together children whose families share the unfortunate plight of battling cancer is the goal of a project started by Adam Bendeson, a social worker whose wife Karen was sick with cancer a few years ago. "My children will not go to a sleep-away camp because if something medically happened to their mother they wouldn't forgive me for shipping them off—at least that's how they see it." He envisions a day camp with three two-week sessions for kids up to age 18 starting next summer at the Suffolk Y on Long Island. Outreach activities will begin in the fall for families. Contact Diane Zamansky, dzamansky@syjcc.org, phone 631-462-9800 x 116.

—compiled by Naomi Danis

Lilith Online Auction Nov 5-17

This beloved fundraiser and friend-raiser is back. Check out the awesome array of offerings we've collected so far, and get inspired to donate your own expertise, artistry and goods: vintage items, vacation-home stays, tickets to special events, etc. Your donations—and your bids—help sustain the great writing and thinking at Lilith magazine. biddingforgood.com/lilithmagazine

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A LADY AND HER BICYCLE

by CHANA WIDAWSKI

I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT—I had jumped into the pages of National Geographic. I had sprung myself across a rickety makeshift bridge, gaping at a raging river in the highlands of West Papua, Indonesia, and there I stood, mesmerized by a procession of men wearing nothing but feathers in their hair and *koteka*, gourds, on their penises.

I stood in the misty rain, alongside my Papuan guide whose teeth were red as blood from chewing betel nut, praying that I wouldn't catch fleas from sleeping in the round straw hut where I would be bunking with the village's women, children and pigs. That night I sat around the hut's lung-choking smoky fire exchanging shy stares and smiles with the Dani women and children, as we each grabbed fingers full of cooked sweet potato greens, slurping them nois-

ily into our mouths. Rather than stressing about the rat scurrying around the edges of the hut's rounded walls, I focused on the young girl making a *bilum*, a string bag for carrying anything from babies, to newborn pigs, to hundreds of pounds of sweet potatoes.

I had somehow managed to become a person who biked the mountains of Thailand.

I couldn't believe I was there. Me, a young Jewish woman from Rochester, New York. I had somehow managed to become a person who cycled the crowded streets of Cambodia, biked the mountains of northern Thailand and was now in a remote village worthy of National Geographic. It was intoxicating.

So you can imagine my excitement when, back in my New York humdrum life, I stumbled upon a book about Annie Londonderry, the first woman to cycle around the globe. And no, she didn't do it in the 1990s. It was the 1890s! Obsessed with everything bicycle and energized by travel stories, particularly those of intrepid women, I couldn't wait to get my hands on a copy of her biography *Around the World on Two Wheels: Annie Londonderry's Ride*. When I learned that Annie Londonderry's real name was Annie Cohen Kopchowsky, that her first language was Yiddish, and that she lived with her peddler husband, kids and extended family in a crowded tenement in Boston's West End, I was entranced.

When Annie set out on this epic journey as a novice biker at age 24 in 1894, it was because two wealthy men were betting whether

a woman could fend for herself and earn \$5,000 while cycling the world in 15 months. Much was happening in both the women's movement and the bicycle craze, and Annie was zealous about cycling her way out of the traditional woman's role. She happily reinvented herself with an exciting new identity, found lots of sponsors, and gained both freedom and fame.

The author, Annie's great-grandnephew Peter Zheutlin, has filled his pages with countless news articles from around the globe, many of which, however, indicate that she was at times a sensation-

alist, not so wed to the truth.

While it becomes clear that she didn't cycle nearly as much as purported, and likely didn't get into some of the scuffles she al-

leged, Annie most certainly demonstrated a brilliant ability to seize authentic adventures and to captivate audiences. She inspired girls and women to become increasingly independent and freethinking, using the bicycle as her vehicle.

Kudos to Annie for embracing the bike! According to Susan B. Anthony, "Bicycling has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world."

Whether Annie actually cycled the globe or took steamboats and trains so she could cover more countries, hear more languages and taste more flavors, I appreciate how she quenched her thirst for adventure. We are kindred spirits, Annie and I, with a shared passion for travel, independence and the power of wheels.

In some ways, I feel like she is with me on my journeys. When I cycled the length of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, hydrating on coconuts and rolling from village to village, Annie was surely with me. When I biked the hills of Tuscany to raise money for a domestic violence shelter, I'm sure Annie was cheering me on. And when I wave at Lady Liberty each day on my commute across the Brooklyn Bridge, Annie and her immigrant family are certainly by my side.

I'd like to thank Zheutlin for introducing us to his great-grandaunt, Annie Kopchowsky (Londonderry) and I certainly come from the same sisterhood, curious about the world, and capable of anything. ■

Chana Widawski, LMSW, chairs her block association, stewards her local park and leads educational travel programs around the globe. She works with survivors of abuse and violence and as a non-profit consultant.